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STUDIES IN THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Anarchy, Miracles, and Madness



Justin J. Meggitt

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JUSTIN J. MEGGITT



Mutual Academic
Cambridge

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*jan RebeKah o, mi olin e sina tan ni: soweli suwi pi kute
suli li pona mute mute tawa sina.*

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NOTE

The essays included in this collection have undergone some minor modifications from the forms in which they were initially published. This was largely done to ensure consistency of style throughout the volume but a few corrections and changes for clarification have also been made.

As many readers may not be familiar with some of the ancient sources used, an author's name is never abbreviated, and the title of any non-biblical work is given in full the first time it appears in a chapter. However, subsequent appearances are cited using abbreviations recommended by the Society of Biblical Literature, and in cases where it does not provide guidance, the Oxford Classical Dictionary.

All citations from classical sources, unless otherwise stated, are from the Loeb Classical Library.

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I would not have become interested in the question of myth and the sources of the historical Jesus if it had not been for R. Joseph Hoffman. The essay on Jesus and healing would not have taken the form it did without the support of the late Maurice Casey and James Crossley. It is unlikely that it, and my essay on the psychology of Jesus, would ever have been published without Fraser Watts asking for them both to be considered for collections he was editing. The essay on the historical Jesus and anarchism would not have seen the light of day without Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, who organised both the conference on anarchism and religion at which it was initially delivered and the subsequent volume of essays on the subject. My work on madness and the historical Jesus was something that I only turned into article form because Dave Horrell said it sounded like something others would want to consider. The piece on the Christ-myth theory would not have reached its final state without the active interest of Francis Watson and Simon Gathercole. The final essay in the collection, on magic in the early Roman empire, was honed as a result of feedback from Peter Jackson Rova and his colleagues at Stockholm University (where I have been fortunate to be a visiting researcher since 2012). However, it had the longest gestation of all the pieces in this collection. The basic problem it seeks to address first struck me when I gave a series of lectures on magic with my friend, Jim Aitken, over twenty-five years ago (and his recent death has

made me all the more aware of how valuable conversations with him always were). To all of these people, and all the anonymous reviewers who have, over the years, provided feedback on earlier versions of the essays in this volume, I am extremely grateful.

I should also thank several others, in Cambridge and elsewhere, who have been important in thinking through the ideas contained in these pages, even if they may not have realised it, and are unlikely to agree with the arguments I make and the conclusions I draw: Jenny Bavidge, Andrew Brown, Andrew Chester, Per Faxneld, Emmanouela Grypeou, David Herbert, Morna Hooker, Judy Lieu, Jane McLarty, Ashley Meggitt, Cariad Rees Morgan, Chris Rowland, Bill Telford, Jeremy Toner, Simon Watson, and Daniel Weiss.

However, above all, I need to acknowledge the consistent encouragement of James Carleton Paget. James has always believed that I have something useful to say about the historical Jesus, even when I have been less certain myself. Without his confidence in the value of the essays in this collection and his insightful critiques of earlier drafts of virtually all of them, I doubt much of what is here would ever have been written.

INTRODUCTION

The following essays consist of a number of contributions to the study of the historical Jesus that I have made over the last fifteen years. Some are relatively well known — “The madness of King Jesus” was a set text in an Open University course for several years, and “Was the historical Jesus an anarchist?” has proved sufficiently popular that a leading anarchist journal in Germany recently published it in translation (excerpts even went moderately viral on TikTok).¹ Others are rather more obscure, but they appear here because I have had requests to make them more readily available, having initially appeared in collections that are hard for many to find. The final essay, “Did magic matter?”, is unusual because, unlike the others, it is not directly concerned with the study of the historical Jesus. However, I hope it will shed useful light on an important aspect of the context within which he lived. It challenges assumptions about the ubiquity of magic in the early Roman empire held by classicists that New Testament scholars have taken over wholesale but, in my judgement, need to be rethought.

There are two driving forces behind this collection. The first will become apparent to anyone reading the collection as a whole: my consistent preoccupation with what is called “history from below”. To me, this historical movement requires historians, including those concerned with studying the historical Jesus, to approach whatever question they ask by taking into account the experiences and practices of those who have suffered from what E. P. Thompson called “the enormous condescension of posterity”.² In most of history, this group

consists of virtually everyone aside from the leading political and cultural actors of the day. Of course, this is not an easy task, especially in the ancient world where most people who lived and died left little or nothing behind. Nonetheless, as I hope will be apparent in what follows, even if such an approach does no more than make us sceptical of claims about what was prevalent or salient in a past culture, it contributes something valuable to our understanding (although most of the time it can result in far more than that). Above all, “history from below” takes seriously the assumption that all people possess agency, even if others have sought to constrain, deny, or erase evidence of it, and tries, however imperfectly, to determine the implications of this for how we write about the past.

To those who know the work on Paul I undertook at the beginning of my career,³ the fact that I am still championing “history from below” twenty-five years later may make me sound like a broken record. However, “history from below” is not an intellectual fashion whose time has passed; one needs only look at the recent work of those studying Atlantic slavery⁴ or ancient history⁵ to see how it continues to bear fruit. Rather, it is something that should be a perennial concern of anyone studying history, and especially the history of earliest Christianity. Indeed, its fundamental impulse — taking seriously those without a voice or whose voice has been suppressed — is something found across a range of emancipatory approaches from which those studying the historical Jesus have profited in recent years, such as womanist, postcolonial, or queer biblical criticism.

The other driving force behind this collection is teaching, or, more accurately, students. All of these essays emerged from classes that I taught for the University of Cambridge’s Institute of Continuing Education, where anybody with an interest in the subject, and willing to work at undergraduate level, regardless of their academic background, was welcome to participate. As

anyone who has taught in continuing education will know — a sector that, coincidentally, was crucial in the emergence of “history from below” — the syllabus, to a great extent, is driven by the questions that students pose rather than those professionals within the field seek to answer. Continuing education, in the UK at least, is largely something that takes place in a post-Christian context. So the questions asked about the historical Jesus did not generally reflect the preoccupations of Christian theology, which continue, however indirectly, to shape much of the teaching about the subject elsewhere within UK universities. So, over the years, I was regularly asked such things as: Did Jesus exist? Was he mad? Did he ever heal anybody? And the essays included here, to a significant extent, reflect my attempts to answer them. In the world of continuing education, no questions are inadmissible, and no answers, as long as they are carefully and critically argued, are unacceptable.

It is also because of these students, and my awareness of the extortionate prices charged by most academic publishers, something which means most professional scholarship remains unavailable to those who would find it of greatest interest, that the electronic version of this book is free to anyone that wants it, and print copies can be purchased at cost. In the past, I used to lug boxes of books to village halls and other adult education venues across East Anglia, so students could make up their own minds about what we were discussing in the classes by reading the latest contributions of colleagues in the field. However, I was always conscious that when the course ended I would have to pack up all those expensive monographs and journals and return them to Cambridge. Although times have moved on, and some historical Jesus scholarship is now available via open access, this book is, in part, my response to that inequity.

Notes

1. Justin J. Meggitt, "War Jesus ein Anarchist? Anachronismus, Anarchismus und der historische Jesus," *Espero: Libertäre Zeitschrift* 4 (2022): 11–85.
2. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 12.
3. Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).
4. See, for example, Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (New York, NY: Viking, 2012); Rediker, *The Fearless Benjamin Lay: The Quaker Dwarf Who Became the First Revolutionary Abolitionist* (London: Verso, 2017).
5. See, for example, Cyril Courrier and Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira, eds., *Ancient History from Below: Subaltern Experiences and Actions in Context* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021).

CHAPTER 1.

POPULAR MYTHOLOGY IN THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE AND THE MULTIPLICITY OF JESUS TRADITIONS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this essay is to examine the implications for our evaluation of traditions about Jesus of the dynamics of mythmaking (or *mythopoesis*) in the early Roman empire. When the popular cultural contexts within which stories about Jesus were first told or retold are taken into account, it becomes apparent that they are likely to be characterised by far more creativity, improvisation, idiosyncrasy, and inconsistency than has hitherto been assumed by most New Testament scholars. Far from being careful and cautious in their handling of such traditions, the earliest Christians appear to have been largely indiscriminate or partisan in their judgements and, for the most part, show little concern about questions of historicity that so preoccupy current scholarship. This does not render any attempt to study the historical Jesus impossible but it does demand a high level of historical agnosticism on many matters that is rarely conceded by those in the field.

The period between the origins of traditions about Jesus and the composition of written texts referring to him has been poorly conceived in much New Testament scholarship. Most scholars have tended to underestimate or pass over the potential for mythmaking in the initial years of movements that made claims,

of one kind or another, about the figure of Jesus. It is usually argued that such activity is only evident in later traditions about Jesus and largely restricted to non-canonical sources, visible in such details as, for example, the speaking cross of the *Gospel of Peter* or the petulant miracles of the child Jesus in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Where present in the canonical accounts, it is usually thought to be confined mainly to either the beginning or the end of narratives about Jesus' life — the points at which, for example, the synoptic gospels most obviously and significantly diverge and conflict (one needs only compare the birth narratives of Luke and Matthew).¹ Invention within the main body of traditions about Jesus is often presumed to be limited to imaginative embellishments of a discernible historical tradition transmitted by his first followers — accretions that can be removed through the application of appropriate criteria (though there is, of course, much dispute as to what these criteria might be).² Two common, related assumptions lead most scholars to have faith in the notion of a recoverable, underlying core that contains authentic data about the historical Jesus that is fundamentally distinguishable and separable from myth. These are the beliefs that:

- (i) Central traditions about Jesus originated with, and were somehow determined by, the teachings and actions of the historical Jesus himself.
- (ii) Such traditions were transmitted and controlled by communities of believers in Jesus that either corporately, or through the ongoing authority given to eyewitnesses, guarded against significant innovation.

As we shall see, both these assumptions are questionable. In fact, the licence and creativity of those that relayed stories about Jesus are likely to have been so great that the association between

many traditions and specific historical events that may have been their original genesis is largely unrecoverable.

POPULAR MYTHOLOGY AND THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE

DEFINITION OF “POPULAR”

It is important to begin with some brief remarks about the use of the term “popular” in the context of this essay. By using this term I want to draw attention to the understandings and experiences of myth that were prevalent in the early empire and to note that these do not necessarily equate with ideas and concerns of the literary elite that tend to dominate our interpretations. I use the term “popular” here, as I have elsewhere in studies of method in the analysis of the church at Corinth,³ early Christian attitudes towards magic and healing,⁴ mental illness,⁵ the imperial cult,⁶ and economics,⁷ to draw attention to practices and beliefs that appear to be widespread and common in the empire but are generally neglected by those whom I believe do not take time to establish a plausible context of interpretation; those who eschew the difficult questions about not just the *presence* but also the *prevalence* of practices and beliefs when establishing the background of early Christianity. In short, I am keen that we recognise what E. P. Thompson has called (albeit in a different context) “the enormous condescension of posterity”⁸ that has left most people in history without a history, something that has adversely affected our understanding of the context within which the earliest Christians lived. I am not alone in this desire to take the popular cultures of the early Roman empire seriously,⁹ but it still remains an underdeveloped perspective.

I must emphasise that in using the word “popular” I do not necessarily assume a homogeneity amongst the non-elite of the early empire (as though the non-elite of the empire were a

lumpen, undifferentiated mass without ethnic, religious, gendered, economic or other differences, many of which were important to them and should be to us). Nor do I rule out the possibility that there are areas where popular cultures and elite cultures intersect and overlap. For example, Aesop's *Fables* are often taken as evidence, par excellence, of popular culture in the Roman empire¹⁰ but we know that they were also the subject of expensive art in the empire too (Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 1.3), and attracted the attention of the highly educated — according to one tradition Socrates spent the last night of his life versifying some of these fables (Plato, *Phaedo* 61b).

Indeed, in the area of mythology, traditions could be in some sense, shared across most population groups. This is perhaps most obvious with literary traditions. Homer's poems were, for example, the formative and most widely known texts in the empire. Their cultural significance is visible in numerous ways. For example, the Borysthenes on the Black Sea, originally Greek colonists¹¹ allegedly continued to know them by heart although they lost the ability to speak Greek (Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 36.9). They were sufficiently prominent that the poems were even the subject of discussion in rabbinic literature.¹² Heraclitus, a first-century commentator on Homer, could say:

From the earliest age, children beginning their studies are nursed on Homer's teaching. One might say that while we were still in swathing bands we sucked from his epics as from fresh milk. He assists the beginner and later the adult in his prime. In no stage of life, from boyhood to old age, do we ever cease to drink from him. (*Quaestiones Homericae* 1.5–6)¹³

Such a picture was not limited to the educated and wealthy but is confirmed in a wide range of literary and material remains that tell us of the enduring and popular reception of Homer amongst all classes within the empire.¹⁴ Knowledge of his work is evident everywhere, including in material of a peculiarly popular

provenance, such as amulets¹⁵ and do-it-yourself oracles.¹⁶ There is also evidence that literary mythologies or recastings of traditional myth that were of a more recent origin, by the likes of Ovid and Virgil, could similarly be rapidly and enthusiastically embraced by the wider populace.¹⁷

Nonetheless, the term “popular” should remind us that our concern does not begin and end with literature of this kind if we want to understand myth and mythopoesis in the early empire. We need to cast our net rather more widely. It is important to examine literary remains that tell us both directly and indirectly about popular conceptions of myth. The works of Strabo, Pausanias, or Julius Hyginus, should attract most attention, as they give us our most detailed knowledge about local myths, but there is much also to learn from ideas about gods and heroes implicit, for example, in other forms of writing, such as the popular slave biography, the *Vita Aesopi*, the book of dream interpretations produced by Artemidorus, or paradoxographical literature (a popular genre that recounted marvels; Aulus Gellius, *Noctae Atticae* 9.4.1–16).¹⁸ Even graffiti can, on occasion, tell us something.¹⁹ It is also vital to take account of the material culture of the empire. The archaeological record of the eastern Mediterranean should remind us that people inhabited a world full of myths. As Jörg Rüpke, for example, has noted, this is visible in the decorations of temples. The cult statues, the figure ensembles on temple pediments, the friezes that adorned their outside, acroteria and antefixes, all regularly depicted mythological scenes or the attributes of gods.²⁰ In addition, we should add formal paintings depicting scenes from myths that also furnished temples and other public spaces and which were regularly commented upon, for example, by Pausanias (for example, *Graeciae descriptio* 1.3; 1.15) but have left little trace today — although the wall paintings of houses in Pompeii, especially The House of the Tragic Poet, may give us some

intimations of their character.²¹ Such visual representations were clearly very influential on the ways that stories were known and interpreted (“poets and painters make an equal contribution to our knowledge of the deeds and the looks of heroes”; Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 1.1).

We should also not overlook private or semipublic material culture too, including the plethora of domestic artefacts, the precious “small things” that James Deetz²² has reminded us are so central to the ways that past people constructed their lives and allow us to get an insight into the character and content of ideas that were significant and widespread: we can learn much, for example, from the mythical iconography evident or evoked in such things as cooking utensils, brick stamps, oil lamps, figurines, vase paintings, coins, bath tokens, jewellery, amulets, and grave markers.

Of course, it is not always easy to make sense of some of this data and to gauge how typical or representative it might be. The renderings of myth are also sometimes perplexing. For example, what should we make of a scrap of a second-century CE Homer hypothesis found at Oxyrhynchus that omits any reference to the activity of the gods?²³ Many of the visual representations of myths or artefacts associated with them are not just hard for us to interpret but appear to have left the ancient viewer confused or undecided too (for example, Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.35.7–8; 5.18.6–7).²⁴

A number of key modes of transmission of popular mythology are also now largely unrecoverable. Songs and oral traditions about the gods and heroes, which were probably the main ways that myths were transmitted, are largely lost to us, with occasional exceptions recoverable from the pages of Strabo or Pausanias.²⁵ We hear only indirectly about the visual representations of myths that accompanied festivals (for example, Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11) or public games (such as

the “fatal charades” in which victims were dressed up as gods and made to enact famous mythical scenes before being butchered).²⁶ We know virtually nothing about the most popular form of theatrical entertainment in the first-century Roman empire, the mime (Cicero, *Pro Rabirio Postumo* 35; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai* 1.20d; Philo, *In Flaccum* 34, 38, 72, 75)²⁷ even though mimes functioned to give popular form to myth, both ancient and modern (they were not silent but accompanied by songs and dialogue; Lucian, *De Saltatione* 29–30, 63, 68). Mime artists were capable of rapidly forging new myths, when events required it, that could provoke powerful, even violent, reactions in their audience (not least through their roles at funerals).²⁸

Problems of evidence and interpretation aside, the attempt to focus upon popular mythology is one worth undertaking. Nonetheless, negative judgements on the value of the cognate, though distinct, business of studying popular religion in the empire might make our subject matter somewhat contentious to some. Peter Brown, for example, dismissed the notion of “popular religion” in his influential *The Cult of the Saints*, describing it as a two-tier approach derived from the prejudices of commentators.²⁹ Yet, Jaś Elsner’s response to his criticism is apposite:

There is much that was right about Brown’s position, especially his criticism of the lazy thinking that blamed anything a scholar disapproved of on the vulgar habits of the masses. But one of the problems of the abandonment of two tiers is that the whole of popular religion becomes merely that which is sanctioned and tolerated by the elite.³⁰

The revisiting of popular religion in the early Roman empire is long overdue, and important work, such as David Frankfurter’s seminal study of religion in Roman Egypt,³¹ is indicative of what can be gained by such a focus. It alerts us to the ways in which worshippers sustained, innovated, and appropriated meanings

through their own rituals and interpretations unsanctioned by elite and priestly classes intent on trying to control the forms of practice and tradition that should predominate. Similar dynamics can be uncovered when we examine “popular mythology”.

DEFINITIONS OF MYTH

It is also important, at this stage, to define what is meant in this essay by *myth*. Definitions of myth are numerous³² but few bear much resemblance to the meaning of the Greek term *mythos* that will be the focus of this paper. Although the meaning of this word changed over time, it can be usefully thought of as referring to a story, or more precisely, a popular story of a god or hero.³³ As Ken Dowden notes, by the first century BCE it seems to have been common to think of myths as including matters which were neither true nor probable (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.13).³⁴ T. P. Wiseman remarks, “Such a story may be (in our terms) historical, pseudo-historical or totally fictitious, but if it matters enough to be retold, it can count as a myth.”³⁵

This conception of myth might, to some, seem rather anaemic. As Fritz Graf has noted, an enormous semantic gap has arisen between what was meant by *mythos* (or the Latin *fabula*) and modern meanings of myth as a consequence of processes begun in the eighteenth century.³⁶ Most definitions today assume that myth can be described rather more precisely and many are predicated on the notion that the term should be limited to hoary old tales about a time long before or apart from the world of the teller, involving non-human beings and extraordinary events. Myths are assumed to be bearers or generators of significant meanings about, for example, society, morality, psychology, ontology, cosmology, history or ritual life. “They are more than stories that lack empirical validation; they serve as symbolic

statements about the meaning and purpose of life in this world.”³⁷

The question of the definition of myth has been even more confused by the unhelpful distinction between *myth* and *legend* so ingrained in the thinking of New Testament scholars (largely, as a result of the ongoing legacy of form criticism, and notably Martin Dibelius and Rudolph Bultmann).³⁸ As Graf says, such attempts at categorisation are “irrelevant at best, misleading at worst ... There is no scholarly consensus as to what these categories mean.”³⁹ It has also been complicated by the fact that many of those studying the historical Jesus have preferred, in the last few decades, to use the terms *narrative* or *story* in preference to myth,⁴⁰ because these words are less emotionally charged and allow critics to sidestep questions of historicity implicit in the latter.

Although I think that Burton Mack is quite right to complain that contemporary scholarship concerned with Christian origins has suffered as a consequence of its failure to engage with what he terms “modern myth theory”,⁴¹ and outputs of the Society of Biblical Literature’s Seminar on Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins demonstrate what can be gained by attending to just such approaches,⁴² for the purposes of this essay, a narrower, rather more prosaic understanding of myth as *a story about a popular figure which includes material that is neither true nor probable* will be used without any theoretical assumptions about the function or meaning of such material.

THE CHARACTER OF MYTH IN THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE

So, having explored what we mean by popular mythology in the early empire, we need now to say something of its fundamental character before briefly elucidating some of its central features. John Gould’s remarks are particularly apposite. He notes that:

Absence of finality is characteristic of Greek myth. Greek myth is open-ended; a traditional story can be re-told, told with new meanings, new incidents, new persons, even with a formal reversal of old meaning. ... The improvisatory character of Greek myths is not just a literary fact. ... It is not bound to forms hardened and stiffened by canonical authority, but mobile, fluent and free to respond to a changing experience of the world.⁴³

Of course, what Gould says here refers predominately to Greek myth and some might feel that it therefore of little consequence for understanding the way myth could be conceived in other cultural contexts, primarily in the eastern Mediterranean, in which we know the earliest Christians lived. However, a tendency towards mythmaking was an inextricable characteristic of popular Hellenism (still a valid concept, though one requiring substantial critical reflection),⁴⁴ and Hellenism was a dynamic, component part, in some manner, of all cultures within the eastern empire (indeed, in many ways, it was constituted by these cultures, taking different forms in different locations, through processes of fusion and hybridisation). Whilst is no way wishing to downplay the differences between, for example, Roman and Greek cultures and religion, differences that preoccupied writers such as Plutarch, in his *Questiones Romanae* and *Questiones Graecae*, we should not assume, for example, that Romans and those influenced by Roman culture did not approach myth in the same way and have the same capacity for mythmaking. As Wiseman has shown, the notion that the Romans did not have their own myths, is really a legacy of Romanticism and does not reflect the evidence: "The Romans were not a people without myths. They too had stories to tell about their gods, their forefathers and the achievements of their city."⁴⁵ We need to rid ourselves of some age-old prejudices about Roman culture that continue to shape interpretations today; Kurt Latte's description of the Romans as "an unspeculative and unimaginative people" who simply borrowed

and left undeveloped the myths of the Greeks, is not accurate as we can see from a cursory examination of, for example, Ovid's *Fasti*, the poem about the Roman sacred calendar.⁴⁶ Elsewhere in the empire, Frankfurter's work on Roman Egypt shows just such mythic dynamism as characteristic of religion there,⁴⁷ and we can see something similar in the cult of Magna Mater (Cybele) which continued to develop in Phrygia and throughout the empire, amongst the Anatolian diaspora and others in Greece and Rome long after the formal importation of the Goddess into Rome in 204 BCE.⁴⁸

Nor should it be thought that Jews were somehow exceptions, uninfluenced by the prevailing cultural forces that shaped the lives of others in the region, and with which they had lived for centuries.⁴⁹ As has been recently argued, we need a revised analytical paradigm for understanding the relationship between Hellenism and Judaism, and Alexander might well be right that this should now be "always in favour of similarity rather than dissimilarity".⁵⁰ One only needs to look at the tendencies in traditions about such key first-century figures as Yohanan ben Zakkai⁵¹ or the unhistorical and fantastical narratives that found their way into the Talmud⁵² or Philo's *De Vita Mosis* to see that mythmaking was as common amongst Jews as anyone else in the early empire (and such an attitude to myth is not in any way dependent upon syncretism or Jewish involvement in Graeco-Roman religious practices).

So having established the open-ended nature of mythmaking in the early empire, let us now make a few further remarks about its character before returning to the question of the early Christian traditions about Jesus.

THE FECUNDITY OF MYTH

Myth in the early empire was *not* conservative. Pausanias at times despaired because of its constant mutations. He complained,

“Those who like to listen to the miraculous are themselves apt to add to the marvel, and so they ruin truth by mixing it with falsehood.” He did not restrict this practice to those who recounted tales about the past, noting that even events in his own day “have been generally discredited because of the lies built up on a foundation of fact.” (*Descr.* 8.2.6–7).

Even when knowledge of written, canonical versions of a myth became widespread, as was the case with Virgil and Homer, further mythmaking could continue apace, often involving the deliberate rewriting and reordering of the written accounts. Tertullian’s complaints about how heretics used Christian scripture contain a passing reference to just such widespread practices:

In profane writings also an example comes ready to hand of a similar facility. You see in our own day, composed out of Virgil, a story of a wholly different character, the subject-matter being arranged according to the verse, and the verse according to the subject-matter. In short, Hosidius Geta has most completely pilfered his tragedy of Medea from Virgil. A near relative of my own, among some leisure productions of his pen, has composed out of the same poet The Table of Cebes. On the same principle, those poetasters are commonly called Homero-centones, “collectors of Homeric odds and ends”, who stitch into one piece, patchwork fashion, works of their own from the lines of Homer, out of many scraps put together from this passage and from that (in miscellaneous confusion). Now, unquestionably, the Divine Scriptures are more fruitful in resources of all kinds for this sort of facility. Nor do I risk contradiction in saying that the very Scriptures were even arranged by the will of God in such a manner as to furnish materials for heretics, inasmuch as I read that “there must be heresies”, [1 Cor 11.19] which there cannot be without the Scriptures. (*De Praescriptione* 39)

Written material and oral traditions could be combined in a myriad of new configurations to create yet further myths. This,

for example, is evident from the remarks of Philo, who begins his *De Vita Mosis* with the following words:

I shall proceed to narrate the events which befell him, having learnt them both from those sacred scriptures which he has left as marvellous memorials of his wisdom, and having also heard many things from the elders of my nation, for I have continually connected together what I have heard with what I have read, and in this way I look upon it that I am acquainted with the history of his life more accurately than other people. (*De Vita Mosis* 1.1.4)

From what we can tell, specifically oral renderings of myth within the empire appear to have been a particularly creative undertaking, characterised by improvisation. With the possible exception of some distinctive groups, such as the Pythagoreans, “verbatim transmission of memorised traditions does not appear to apply to the vast majority of oral traditions in the Greco-Roman world.”⁵³

THE PLURIFORM NATURE OF MYTH

It is perhaps unsurprising that mythmaking does not appear to have been overburdened with a concern for coherence and consistency. For most people there were no significant problems caused by the persistence of multiple versions of the same myth, even when they flatly contradicted one another, and no particular reason to choose between them.

Even Pausanias, for example, is often content merely to recount different versions of a story without indicating which he considers the more plausible (for example, Oedipus in *Descr.* 1.28.6). Artemidorus similarly advises that one should not seek to distinguish between contradictory versions of a tradition (although he considers non-miraculous accounts are more likely to be accurate; *Oneirocritica* 4.47; see also Plutarch, *Vitae parallelae* 2.3–6). Even the existence of the tomb of Zeus in Crete and the local tradition that the king of the gods was, in fact, dead,

does not seem to have bothered most people in the empire until it became part of the arsenal of arguments used by Christian apologists against Graeco-Roman religion (see Athenagoras, *Apologia* 30; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.43; *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* 5.23, 6.21).

As Pausanias complained, for most of those who lived within the Roman empire, the kinds of myths they believed did not need to be coherent or require rational scrutiny: “Most people tell and believe untruths, including whatever they picked up as children from tragedies and oratorios” (*Descr.* 1.3.3). Although there were educated students of myth, such as Plutarch, who tried “to purify the mythic, making it yield to reason” (*Vita Thesei* 1.5), to remove the wheat from the chaff, standing in a rational tradition of criticism of classical myth that went back at least as far as Hecataeus of Miletus in the sixth century BCE (Pausanias, *Descr.* 3.25.5), they were conscious that neither they, nor those who tried to overcome such problems through the alternative strategy of allegorisation,⁵⁴ represented the prevailing attitude within the popular cultures of the empire. Others were content to allow a profusion of alternative versions of myths to stand, without judging between them.

The inconsistencies in myth were, of course, something of which non-pagan critics could make much. Josephus, for example, ridiculed the claims of Greeks about the accuracy of their knowledge of their past history, noting the incongruities in their myths — something that he ascribed, in part, to the oral nature of the earliest accounts (notably in relation to Homer; *Contra Apionem* 1.2–3). He contrasted them unfavourably with the antiquity and accuracy of the Jewish written canon (*C. Ap.* 1.37–43), although we also know from adverse comments of Philo, that other educated Jews saw similar problems with the biblical texts which they too treated as myths ripe for criticism

(*De Abrahamo* 33.178–34; see also *De Confusione linguarum* 2.2–4, 9).⁵⁵

THE LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF MYTH

This incoherence came about, in part, because most people were not expected to know the myths in any particular detail. With some exceptions, Graeco-Roman religion of the early empire was not textual, and what texts did contain some kind of authority — notably the Sibylline Oracles (or rather, what could be reconstructed of them after a devastating fire of 83 BCE) — do not seem to have contained much in the way of myth and could only be consulted by a few specialists. Although the contents of myth did form part of most people's education, both formal and informal, at an early age, "only those who had attended school knew the fine points ... The essence of a myth is not that everyone knows it but that it is supposed to be known and is worthy of being known by all."⁵⁶ Literary evidence indicates just such partial and somewhat confused knowledge on the part of many in the early empire. Petronius, for example, portrays the freedman Trimalchio self-consciously and inaccurately referencing Homer (*Satyricon* 39.3–4; 48.7; 52.1–2). Interestingly, as David Noy has suggested, those who were enslaved were often prevented from having anything but the most limited knowledge of the cults of their homeland,⁵⁷ something that may well have hastened the creation of alternative renderings of myth and tolerance of diversity of myth in the empire.

VARIOUS MODALITIES OF BELIEF AND MYTH

The nature of belief in myths varied. As Paul Veyne notes, "modalities of belief are related to the ways in which truth is possessed"⁵⁸ and there was no formal expectation of belief in

the literal “truth” of myth as the religions of the Greeks and Romans were, within limits, religions of orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy. As he rightly says, when we ask:

Did the Greeks believe in their mythology? The answer is difficult, for ‘believe’ means so many things. Not everyone believed that Minos, after his death, continued being a judge in Hell, or that Theseus fought the Minotaur, and they knew that poets ‘lie’. However, their way of not believing the things is disturbing to us. For in the minds of the Greeks, Theseus had nonetheless, existed. It was necessary only to ‘purify Myth by Reason’ and refine the biography of Heracles’ companion to its historic nugget.⁵⁹

One of the perhaps surprising cultural assumptions that seems to emerge from examining mythology in antiquity is the paradox that “there were people who did not believe in the existence of the gods, but never did anyone doubt the existence of the heroes.”⁶⁰ Indeed:

From the fifth century B.C. to the fourth century A. D., absolutely no one, Christians included, ever expressed the slightest doubt concerning the historicity of Aeneas, Romulus, Theseus, Heracles, Achilles, or even Dionysus; rather, everyone asserted this historicity.⁶¹

Euhemerism, the conviction that the gods were really humans about whom legends had grown, did not function to undermine the subjects of myth but gave people a reason to believe in them.

THE INFORMAL TRANSMISSION OF MYTH AND THE PROCESS OF MYTHMAKING

There were a number of ways in which myth could be learned and relearned throughout a person’s life in the empire. Although it is hard to know, as Aune has noted,⁶² exactly what narratives accompanied many festivals or were expressed in hymns as we have so little information about the liturgical life of Graeco-

Roman religion in the early empire, nonetheless *aretalogoi* — professional tellers of the activities of gods and heroes — seem to have functioned around temples,⁶³ and were possibly employed in richer households (for example, Suetonius, *Octavius* 78.2). Freelance, professional recounters of myths seem to have been common and plied their wares, alongside jugglers and musicians, in crowds (Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 20.9–10). Those visiting famous religious sites seem to have been plagued by guides keen to interpret the stories evidenced in the paintings, sculptures or inscriptions, or to provide local traditions, for a small fee, even if, much as today, such information was not easy to believe, something we can see in remarks by Lucian (*Amores* 8), Pausanias (*Descr.* 1.19.2; 1.31.5; 2.9.7), and Plutarch (*De Pythiae oraculis* 395a).⁶⁴ As Nicholas Horsfall has reminded us in his recent study of the culture of the Roman plebs, most of the inhabitants of the empire acquired their culture without formal schooling, through the theatre or other leisure pursuits.⁶⁵

Although education in the content and criticism of myth, particularly as found in Homer, would form part of any formal education⁶⁶ — indeed, Homer was at the core of primary education throughout the empire⁶⁷ — one recurring feature of descriptions of myth in antiquity is that most initially learned myths in a domestic context, from the women directly involved in their early upbringing. Women in antiquity were, perhaps unsurprisingly, “a fundamental instrument of the transmission of a culture”.⁶⁸ As Philostratus the Elder remarked to an inquisitive ten-year-old:

That Theseus treated Ariadne unjustly ... when he abandoned her while asleep on the island of Dia, you must have heard from your nurse; for these women are skilled in telling such tales and they weep over them whenever they will. (*Imagines* 1.14)

The extent of information transmitted in this manner clearly varied. Veyne, for example, questions whether children were

taught the great mythic cycles early in their lives, suggesting that they had to wait until they were “under the grammarian’s authority to learn the great legends”⁶⁹ — assuming they were sufficiently privileged to gain a formal education of that kind. However, from what we can determine, the telling of myths, or parts of them, by these women, educating and entertaining their charges, involved improvisation and innovation. Philostratus the Younger, for example, recalls how his nurse “entertained me with these tales, which she accompanied with a pretty song; some of them even used to make her cry” (*Heroicus* 136–7).

There were no particular controls on how a myth was presented within this context and our data emphasises that the retellings often focused upon events of a miraculous nature (indeed, for some elite males, reflecting their own notions about rationality and gender, belief in the miraculous was a peculiarly female characteristic; Polybius, *Historiae* 12.24.5). In the words of Tacitus, young children were exposed to “idle tales and gross absurdities” (*Dialogus de oratoribus* 29) — though most treated these “absurdities” as fact, as Sextus Empiricus complained (*Pyrrhonian Outlines* 1.147; see also Aetnidorus, *Oneirocritica* 4.47).

Despite the evidence of the prominence of women as transmitters of myth within a domestic context, this has largely been ignored in studies of oral tradition in the Roman empire.⁷⁰ Although this has merited mention by some,⁷¹ it has also been passed over in major contributions of New Testament scholars on the role of the oral tradition in the origins of Christianity, and is not discussed in works such as those by Birger Gerhardsson, Werner Kelber, James Dunn, and Richard Bauckham.⁷² This neglect is perhaps all the more surprising given a possible indication of the importance of this process within the churches in the words addressed to “Timothy” by “Paul”: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother

Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you" (2 Tim 1.5).

EVIDENCE OF CONCERN ABOUT MYTH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Having now sketched something of the place and character of popular myth within the early empire, let us now turn to its significance for our evaluation of the early traditions about Jesus.

First, it is clear that the production of myth, the spinning of stories about Jesus, was a concern in some early communities. In a number of places in the New Testament, the authors are keen to distinguish themselves from those whom they complained purveyed myths about Jesus. For example in 2 Peter: "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pet 1.16). Although this passage probably implies that the author believed that the "cleverly devised myths" were being proclaimed by others, as for example, John Kelly maintains,⁷³ it is also possible, as Jerome Neyrey has argued, that the author is actually defending himself from the accusation that the traditions he proclaimed were myths.⁷⁴ Whatever the case, some Christ-followers were clearly engaged in this activity.

Similarly, in 1 Timothy we find a clear warning that members of the church should avoid myths (with the obvious implication that myths were, in fact, something that appealed to many early believers):

I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations. (1 Tim 1.3–4)

And, perhaps unsurprisingly, given our previous discussion, the

author of this epistle makes a direct association of dangerous myths with women: “Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives’ tales” (1 Tim 4.7).

Indeed, the process of mythmaking in Christian churches seemed, to the author of 2 Timothy, unavoidable:

For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. (2 Tim 4.3–4)

It is important to note here that the myths in question need not be, as is often assumed, the complex, cosmological and aetiological myths associated with most forms of “Gnosticism” — if we accept, for a moment, the analytical value of the term “Gnosticism”, first coined in the seventeenth century.⁷⁵ Myths of this kind are classically represented by the myth found in the *Apocryphon of John* and Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.29 (and which seems to be present in rudimentary form in traditions about such early “Gnostic” groups as the Simonians; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.23). Such an interpretation of the meaning of *mythos* in the Pastoral epistles owes itself, to a great extent, to the use of the word *gnosis* by the author of 1 Timothy when describing the content of the “profane chatter” of which he so strongly disapproved (1 Tim 6:20). But *gnosis* is a common, non-technical Greek term, and it seems far more likely that the knowledge consisted of myths about Jesus and others, probably biblical characters (indeed, this would better explain the association of such myths specifically with Jews in Titus 1:14).

It is also important to note that the term *myth* here is clearly pejoratively contrasted with the “truth” of the traditions that the respective authors claim to have received (2 Tim 4.4; Titus 1.14; 2 Pet 3.16) and to pass on (1 Tim 6.20; 2 Tim 1.12, 14). However, the traditions about Jesus that were sanctioned and promoted by the author of an epistle such as 1 Timothy would have looked

suspiciously like myth to most inhabitants of the empire. No specific dominical traditions about Jesus are appealed to in the letter and the kerygmatic summary of his life by the author sounds suspiciously mythic according to our initial definition:

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory. (1 Tim 3.16)

So, it appears from the evidence of the Pastoral and Pertine epistles, the early Christians were indeed concerned with mythmaking, both sanctioned and unsanctioned, within their communities.

FROM MONOGENESIS TO POLYGENESIS, FROM ARBORIFORMS TO RHIZOMES

However, the significance of mythmaking for evaluating the earliest traditions about Jesus is particularly apparent when it is married to a more plausible model of the origins of Christianity than that which is currently in the ascendant. The dominant model remains a rather conservative one that reflects, more or less, the pattern presented in the two earliest surviving histories of the church — Luke-Acts and Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiae* — in which the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are taken as the originating and determinative events that explain what follows. Such a model allows little room for the creation and proliferation of different traditions about Jesus and their consequences, as it assumes an ongoing coherence and consistency in the development of the faith, with the Jerusalem church functioning, in the early years, as arbiters of tradition and authority amongst all those who propagated a message about Jesus. Such a model presupposes monogenesis.

This model has, of course, had its critics. Although there have

been dissenting voices for centuries, some of whom, such as the seventeenth-century deist Henry Stubbe, deserve to be somewhat better known, following Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (first published in 1934), scholars have been especially aware of the diversity of forms of earliest Christianity. Alternative versions of the faith that subsequently lost out to "orthodoxy" may well have been the first, dominant, and only form of Christianity in many areas. Particularly since Helmut Koester pushed Bauer's historical schema back into the apostolic age,⁷⁶ it has been common to talk, even in relatively conservative circles, about the diversity of theological perspectives in the New Testament, as evidenced by, for example, James Dunn's influential *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*.⁷⁷

However, in recent years, the argument for diversity has been pushed yet further. Some, such as John Dominic Crossan and Burton Mack,⁷⁸ have suggested multiple, distinct forms of the Christian movement from the earliest period, which had little or no common ground other than a reverence for Jesus, and which only gradually merged and assimilated with one another.⁷⁹ For example, it is often noted that Q and the *Gospel of Thomas* seem to have little interest in the death of Jesus, mentioning it at best only obliquely (Q 14.27; *Gos. Thom.* 55),⁸⁰ and preferring instead to focus upon Jesus as a teacher of wisdom. Yet the death of Jesus is a key datum in other forms of early Christianity (for example, Rom 10.9; 1 Cor 2.1–2, etc.), some of which, such as that propagated by Paul, conversely show a similar level of indifference to the sayings traditions of Jesus that Q so cherished. It is hard to see how the life and death of one particular historical figure could account for such diversity of both tradition and interpretation, and so Robert M. Price can even say, with some justification, having surveyed the variety of Jesuses evident in the earliest forms of Christianity, that "it is an open question

whether a historical Jesus had anything to do with any of these Jesuses, much less the Jesuses of the Gospels.”⁸¹

There are, however, good reasons to have reservations about the grounds on which such radical diversity is argued by some. It is unwise, for example, to assume that each text making mention of Jesus was written by and for a community with a distinct understanding of the figure of Jesus. Such texts may be indicative of separate communities but are hardly conclusive proof of them. They often assume knowledge of traditions external to the text which may well be shared with other forms of the faith (for example, the brief reference to John the Baptist in Logion 46 and James the Just in Logion 12 of the *Gospel of Thomas* assumes the readership knows much more about these figures than is evident from the text). The existence of some of the texts on which models of radical diversity are dependent is also far from as assured as some scholars presume. For example, it is often forgotten that Q is a *hypothetical* construct and there are good grounds for doubting its validity⁸² and serious questions are now raised over the authenticity of the *Secret Gospel of Mark*.⁸³

Nonetheless, it seems far more reasonable to envisage the origins of Christianity as polygenic rather than monogenic. Indeed, the canonical New Testament itself, on closer inspection, seems to indicate as much. For example, Apollos, a key figure in the early propagation of faith in Christ in the eastern Mediterranean, who was equal to both Paul and Peter in the eyes of the Corinthian congregation (1 Cor 1.12; 3.4–6, 22; 4.6), and operated independently of both (1 Cor 16.12), appears to have become a committed advocate of Jesus in Alexandria (Acts 18.24). Whatever version of the new religion he obtained there — and we have absolutely no idea who first took ideas about Jesus to Alexandria — it is clear that for the author of Acts of the Apostles it was inadequate (“he only knew the baptism of John” [Acts 18.25]) and it was necessary for him to have the

“Way of God” (a shorthand for the particular understanding of Christianity approved by the author) explained to him more accurately by Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18.26). Although we know little about Apollos, he is representative of this fundamental diversity present at the outset and his story illustrates the mutual ignorance of different forms of Christianity. Similarly, Acts also tells us of a group of “disciples” in Ephesus who again seem to know only about John’s baptism (Acts 19.1–7) and to be ignorant of the role of the Holy Spirit in the new faith — something so aberrant in the eyes of the author of Luke-Acts that, unlike Apollos, it required their rebaptism.

The notion that earliest Christianity, from the outset, took numerous forms is something that seems not to have caused any particular concern amongst the orthodox apologists themselves. Origen, for example, refuted Celsus’ accusation that as Christianity had attracted more and more followers, the self-interest of its leaders led to divisions, by saying that even when the apostles were preaching and eyewitnesses were alive “from the very beginning, when, as Celsus imagines, believers were few in number, there were certain doctrines interpreted in different ways” (Origen, *Cels.* 3.11).

Indeed, unlike many modern scholars, who are reluctant to posit really significant theological diversity in the earliest period, and as a consequence deny the influence of “Gnosticism” in understanding the development of Christianity until the second century, early Christian writers had no difficulty in seeing it present in the initial decades of the religion’s existence, as we can see in what they tell us of, for example, the formative roles of Simon Magus⁸⁴ and Cerinthus.⁸⁵

There is a great deal that we do not know about the emergence of Christianity in this early period, and which we shall never know. However, it seems that the polygenic character of early Christianity allowed individuals and groups to innovate quite

dramatically with little recourse to anyone else. Acts, for example, tells of some followers from Cyprus and Cyrene making the crucial step of converting gentiles in Antioch to what had previously been a Jewish sect. They did this, apparently, without consulting followers of Jesus elsewhere (11.20) nor even informing them (11.22), something that indicates that the Jerusalem church did not function as arbiters of tradition and authority amongst all those who propagated faith in Jesus in the empire, despite its ideological significance in early Christian historiography.⁸⁶ Such developments are unsurprising given the pre-eminence of direct religious experience that not only legitimated but also provided the content of the faith of many early Christians. Paul, for example, could famously claim that his gospel was not of human origin, “for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1.12). However, it is clear that he was not alone in claiming direct revelations from Jesus about the true character of the faith that was to be proclaimed. John of Patmos, for example, could publish letters to the seven churches in Asia purporting to be from the exalted Jesus decades after the latter’s death (Rev 2–3) and which castigated other Christian leaders and groups (Rev 2.14–15, 20–25).

The inability of much scholarship to conceptualise the multiplicity, fluidity and heterogeneity of forms of earliest Christianity is partly accounted for by the influence of predominant metaphors that have been used to describe the movement. Too often accounts speak in terms of roots, trunks, and branches, yet, as Melanie Wright puts it, “Arborescent metaphors go hand-in-hand with hierarchical structure, extreme stratification, and linear thinking”⁸⁷ — notions that seem to do violence to the data that we possess. It might be more helpful to utilise a metaphor made popular by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and to think of early Christianity as fundamentally

rhizomorphous (a rhizome is a horizontal stem of a plant, normally subterranean, that often sends out roots and shoots from nodes, which can themselves break off and survive independently, beginning yet further networks).⁸⁸ Although it is pushing the evidence too far to say that early Christian groups “at first had nothing to do with each other”,⁸⁹ such a metaphor allows for the possibility of only distant or tenuous relationships between some of the groups that emerged and the co-existence of complementary and competing conceptualisations of their origins. When such a polygenic model of the origins of Christianity is taken seriously, the likelihood of endemic mythmaking amongst the first believers becomes all the more plausible.

THE MYTH OF CONTROL IN THE CREATION AND PRESERVATION OF ORAL TRADITIONS ABOUT JESUS

It could be objected that my analysis does not take seriously the evidence that Christian communities, collectively or as a consequence of the ongoing presence of credible eyewitnesses, controlled and delimited the traditions so that innovations of a fundamental kind were impossible. In models presented by, for example, Kenneth Bailey, Richard Bauckham, Thorleif Boman, Samuel Byrskog, James Dunn, Birger Gerhardsson, and Werner Kelber, Christian communities, or individuals of standing within communities, exerted some authority over the transmission of oral material.⁹⁰ Such scholars argue that we should speak of the “preservation” or “survival” of Jesus tradition, albeit in rather different ways.

So, for example, Gerhardsson thinks in terms of the handing on of a tradition that was formally memorised, and was initially explicitly taught by a teacher to his disciples before finding its way into the gospels, whereas Bauckham argues that:

The period between the “historical” Jesus and the Gospels was actually spanned, not by anonymous community transmission, but by the continuing presence and testimony of the eyewitnesses, who remained the authoritative sources of their traditions until their deaths.⁹¹

Dunn speaks of “oral traditioning”, imagining, for example, that when a Christian wished to hear again a particular story in the life of Jesus:

A senior disciple would tell again the appropriate story or teaching in whatever variant words and detail he or she judged appropriate for the occasion, with sufficient corporate memory ready to protest if one of the key elements was missed out or varied too much.⁹²

However, such models seem improbable. Nowhere can we find any explicit statements about communities or representatives of communities making collective judgements on oral traditions in this or any other manner in early Christian sources. From what we know about how early Christians went about sifting the wheat from the chaff when judging the traditions about Jesus, it seems that this was not a collective activity nor one that particularly concerned communities but was rather an initiative of specific individuals within the churches. This is evident from the preface to Luke’s Gospel (1.3) and in what we know of Papias’ collection of the traditions that went into his now-lost *Expositions of Oracles of the Lord* (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39). Indeed, Papias’ account is all the more telling as he contrasts his attempts to discover authentic traditions with the undiscerning “multitude” who “take pleasure in those that speak much” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.3), and yet Papias himself not only seems extremely haphazard in his approach, questioning those who just happened to be visiting his church (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4) but, for all his protestations, appears to have been as drawn to sensational *paradoxa* (marvellous tales; *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.8) as anyone else, and his judgements about the veracity of such traditions were disturbing to later Christians.

Eusebius complained that the collection of oral traditions that Papias compiled contained “strange parables and teachings of the Saviour, and some other more mythical things” (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.11). Indeed, it is clear from the Gospel of John that traditions about Jesus were legion and most early Christians had no difficulty with this: “But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21.25). The author makes it clear that he has selected only a few traditions for inclusion in his gospel and the criteria for selection are expressly theological:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (John 20.30-31)

John nowhere shows any evidence of either doubting traditions he does not include or some collective process in authenticating the material he does. Indeed, John’s apparent indiscriminate attitude towards traditions about Jesus appears to share much with the popular genre of paradoxography which was characterised by “acceptance without question of any available information; the problem of the truth or credibility of the phenomena or facts, which were presented, was simply not raised.”⁹³

Nor can it be contended that our knowledge of the apparently conservative manner in which the early Christians handled written sources about Jesus, evident from examining the relationships between the synoptic gospels,⁹⁴ should lead us to question such widespread credulity on the part of most early Christians when faced with traditions about Jesus. Whatever tendencies may be evident in the handling of *written* sources by early Christian authors is irrelevant for assessing the oral

traditions that may lie behind them with which this essay is concerned. Indeed, there is nothing particularly conservative about the way in which early Christian writers made use of textual sources. Matthew's use of Mark, for example, is characterised by the widespread abbreviation, addition, omission, conflation, elaboration, and reordering of material, and displays a degree of licence indistinguishable from that apparent in the way that Greek, Roman, and Jewish writers of the time made use of their written sources.⁹⁵

CONCLUSION

When properly conceived it is apparent that myth and mythmaking were dynamic components of popular cultures of the early Roman empire and, as we can see from the complaints of the Pastoral and Petrine epistles, were characteristics of early Christian communities too. In light of this, any evaluation of traditions about Jesus must take seriously the likelihood that they could have had little or no direct connection with the historical Jesus himself. Leaving aside the obviously problematic birth and resurrection narratives, *all* traditions about the earthly Jesus, not just those that might strike the modern reader as overtly *mythic*, such as the baptismal miracle (Matt 3.13–17, Mark 1.9–11, Luke 3.21–22), the temptations (Matt 4.1–11, Mark 1.13, Luke 4.1–13), and the transfiguration (Matt 17.1–8, Mark 9.2–8, Luke 9.28–36), were potentially the product of, or affected by, mythmaking, and should be treated with caution.

Indeed, this mythmaking need not have even originated solely with followers of Jesus. For example, the healing narratives, which are present in the earliest Jesus traditions,⁹⁶ are likely to have been attractive to those who were not part of any particular Jesus movement but sought out healing⁹⁷ and may well have originated with them. Figures such as the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19.13–20) or the unnamed exorcist (Mark 9.38), who

exorcised in the name of Jesus, are evidence of the circulation of traditions about Jesus amongst those unconnected with his followers and such people might also have developed further traditions.

In the earliest period, it is also quite possible that some myths about the figure of Jesus continued to be preserved and developed by those who had left the churches, or perhaps believed that the churches had left them. For example, on seeing the risen Jesus, Matthew's Gospel notes that some of his followers worshipped him but it also adds "but some doubted" (Matt 28.17). Elsewhere in the gospels doubt seems to be mentioned in order to be resolved, whether in the famous example of Thomas (John 20.24–29), the appearance of the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24.13–27), or that to the disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24.36–49). However, in this incident, there is no such resolution and the implication is that amongst those Jews who did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus (Matt 28.15) were followers of Jesus.

I would like to conclude by noting that I do believe that it is historically probable that some material within canonical and non-canonical sources might well bear some relation to the sayings and parables taught by Jesus and reflect the reputation he acquired in his lifetime as an effective healer and exorcist.⁹⁸ I have elsewhere argued that it is likely that this figure also met his death on a Roman cross.⁹⁹ However, if anything much can be determined with relative certainty about the historical Jesus from the records we possess, it can only be of the most limited and largely general kind, akin to the handful of "facts" about Jesus' life that Ed Sanders identifies in his skeletal lists.¹⁰⁰ The capacity for, and character of, popular mythopoesis within the early empire, and the concomitant lack of concern for the control of traditions about Jesus amongst his multifarious followers in the decades following his death, despite the

optimistic claims of the likes of Gerhardsson, Dunn, and Bauckham, makes such a conclusion unavoidable.

Notes

1. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1993); Edwin D. Freed, *The Stories of Jesus' Birth: A Critical Introduction*, Biblical Seminar 72 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Gerd Lüdemann, *Virgin Birth?: The Real Story of Mary and Her Son Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1998).
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CHAPTER 2.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND HEALING: JESUS' MIRACLES IN PSYCHOSOCIAL CONTEXT

THE CASE FOR THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

The healing miracles of the historical Jesus may seem, at first sight, an unpromising, if not fanciful subject for critical study. Those unfamiliar with current scholarship might wonder how supernatural phenomena, such as *miracles*, can be the subject of serious *historical* scrutiny in the twenty-first century. In fact, regardless of what one thinks about the possibility of miracles (and, of course, this very much depends upon what one means by a miracle) most of those specialising in the study of the origins of Christianity believe that there are good grounds for holding that the historical Jesus was thought by his contemporaries, including both supporters and critics, to be an effective healer and exorcist. It is in this sense that the healings and exorcisms can be considered to constitute *historical* data and can be open to examination. Although subsequent generations of Christians would become almost fixated by Jesus' reputation as a miracle worker¹ and produced ever more elaborate and fantastical traditions, there are good reasons to look closely at the earliest records of this activity. Indeed, it is my contention that they can stand rather more scrutiny than they have hitherto received: if we look closely at the psychosocial dynamics that seem to characterise the healing activity of the *historical* Jesus as recounted in formative traditions about him, largely embedded

in the Synoptic Gospels, we can go some way to understanding how and why he acquired this reputation as an effective healer.

But first, it is necessary to clarify the grounds which lead many biblical critics to believe that the historical Jesus was, in his own day, thought to be an effective and miraculous healer. There are a number of reasons for this conviction. Jesus' healings and exorcisms are attested in all the major sources that we possess for Jesus' life, both Christian and non-Christian, both supportive and hostile. The evidence is comprehensively surveyed elsewhere² and not much would be gained by repeating it all here (although it is important to note that the multiple attestation of traditions does not give us quite the degree of historical certainty that is often assumed).³ However, it is helpful to give a few indicative examples of material that is judged vital in arriving at such a position. Two specific traditions that are often ascribed to the "Q" source (a hypothetical source that is thought by most New Testament scholars to predate the canonical gospels and to reflect early traditions about the historical Jesus) are usually taken as particularly strong evidence that the *historical* Jesus thought himself to be a healer and exorcist whose activities were visible to all, and to corroborate the broader pictures evident in the gospels and other material.

The first of these is the tradition that John the Baptist asked Jesus whether he was "the one who is to come", a question that produces the following, affirmative answer:

And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me." (Luke 7.22–23 par. Matt 11.4–5)

As it stands, in both Matthew and Luke, the question by the Baptist and the subsequent response are particularly awkward as John is described as having already recognised Jesus' true status

in both gospels; in Matthew, at his baptism (3.14) and in Luke, even earlier, from within his mother's womb (1.41). Such incongruity is usually taken by biblical scholars as evidence that the gospel writers have preserved a primitive tradition — and thus it is all the more likely to be authentic. Jesus' answer to John the Baptist is also a problematic one as healing miracles were not associated with any significant messianic expectations within Judaism in this period and so it comes as something of a surprise, notwithstanding one sliver of evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴ So, as it stands, this incident is unlikely to have been created by the early Church and is most likely to have had its origins in a specific event. If that is the case, then the belief that Jesus carried out healings belongs in the earliest stratum of our knowledge about this figure.

The second key tradition takes the form of a saying in which Jesus explicitly linked the arrival of the Kingdom of God, the chief preoccupation of his preaching,⁵ with his exorcisms:

But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. (Luke 11.20 par. Matt 12.28)

Although brief, this saying too has a good claim to authenticity of some kind, although in this case, primarily on the grounds that it is a "Q" logion and seems to cohere with what we know of characteristics of Jesus' ministry from elsewhere. W. D. Davies and Dale Allison call the authenticity of this second saying "one of the assured results of modern criticism".⁶

To those unfamiliar with the conventions of current historical-critical scholarship the significance placed on these two traditions might seem odd. However, when we combine such early sayings with traditions about Jesus' healings and exorcisms that appear to be very early and multiply attested but evidently did not originate with either him or the early Church, such as the tradition that Jesus expelled demons by the power of Beelzebul,

the prince of demons,⁷ the notion that he was thought to be a healer and exorcist seems all but established.

The fact that non-Christian sources, both Jewish and non-Jewish, also depict Jesus as a figure famed for his ability to heal and exorcise, makes such a picture almost irrefutable and undermines any argument that sees them, *in toto*, as the invention of subsequent Christians. We find, for example, his healings and exorcisms the subject of the earliest anti-Christian polemics of which we have a record, those of Trypho and Celsus (found in Justin Martyr and Origen respectively), who both seem to have access to traditions about Jesus independent of the gospels. The two critics attacked the character of Jesus' miracles and his motivations in performing them but neither claimed that they had not taken place. Criticisms of a similar kind, in which Jesus' miracles were clearly equated with the miracles of magicians, seem to lie behind the accusations that provoked the earliest work of Christian apologetic literature, that of Quadratus of Athens.⁸ The healings and exorcisms also appear to be alluded to in Josephus' *Testimonium Flavianum*,⁹ or rather, in the likely kernel of authentic material that lies at the heart of this much-edited passage by the famous Jewish historian.¹⁰ Indeed, it is fair to say that if Jesus was famous for anything amongst his contemporaries, it was for his healing miracles and exorcisms; the unidentified exorcists who are recorded as using Jesus' name in Mark and Luke,¹¹ and the tradition in Acts that the seven sons of Sceva attempted something similar,¹² point to the antiquity of this estimation.¹³

So it is reasonable to say that the historical Jesus was perceived by his contemporaries to have been a healer. Indeed, as John Meier observes in his work *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, "Put dramatically, but with not too much exaggeration: if the miracle tradition from Jesus' public ministry were to be rejected *in toto* as unhistorical, so should every other

Gospel tradition about him.”¹⁴ And this explains why virtually all scholars of the historical Jesus, whatever their ideological persuasion, accept that the historical Jesus was indeed believed to be a miraculous healer in his own lifetime.¹⁵ It has not always been so¹⁶ and most reconstructions of the historical Jesus still fail to deal adequately with the healing miracles,¹⁷ but in recent decades this consensus has emerged and looks stable.

However, before scrutinising the psychosocial dynamics of the events that lie at the heart of this estimation of the historical Jesus, we need to make some important, preliminary remarks.

First, the fact that Jesus was thought to have been a healer and exorcist in his own lifetime does not, in itself, set him apart from his contemporaries. Others were also believed to have such abilities. For example, from literary sources of the time we hear of Eleazar, a Jewish exorcist who carried out an exorcism in front of Vespasian,¹⁸ and an unnamed Syrian exorcist and Chaldean healer who were reputed to have done similar things.¹⁹ It is clear that a number of those who inhabited the first-century world, both Jew and gentile, were believed to be able to carry out such things. Indeed, according to Celsus, there were many people who “in return for a few coins ... will expel demons from men, and dispel diseases” by apparently miraculous means.²⁰ And in addition to living people, shrines and statues that were believed to effect miraculous cures were found everywhere. A cursory examination of the literary and archaeological records of the cult of Asklepios indicates as much²¹ — indeed, according to Josephus, even Jews could, on occasion, avail themselves of such sites.²² Claims could be made about the healing powers of some of the most unlikely of subjects. For example, Athenagoras, in his *Legatio pro Christianis*, informs us that a statue of Peregrinus, an apostate Christian ridiculed by Lucian of Samosata as a religious charlatan, was regarded as having curative powers.²³ Indeed, the gospels themselves are insistent that Jesus did not have a

monopoly on such miraculous activity. They record Jesus himself saying as much: “If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out ?”²⁴

Second, in saying this I would not like to appear to be arguing that everyone in the ancient world believed in supernatural healings and exorcisms, or that those that did believe in them, believed in them in the same way. There was considerable diversity in the nature and extent of belief in the supernatural in antiquity,²⁵ and there was also significant scepticism too. The New Testament itself contains evidence of just such variegated belief. The Gospel of John, for example, although containing a number of healings, does not contain any exorcisms at all. Although a number of explanations for this anomaly have been suggested,²⁶ the most likely explanation is that the author (or those who first brought together the traditions upon which the author was dependent) evidently did not share the same notions about demons as the other three gospel writers and, indeed, the historical Jesus himself.

Third, it is important to note that it is impossible to say anything for certain historically about any *specific* healing or exorcism. That is not the same as saying that they were not thought to have occurred in ways that resemble the accounts found in the gospels, but we really do not have sufficient grounds to say that any particular miracle tradition is based on a particular historical incident. Others are not so circumspect in this respect. For example, Graham Twelftree lists twenty-two miracles that he believes “can be judged with high confidence to reflect an event or events most likely in the life of the historical Jesus”²⁷ — of which nineteen are healing miracles.²⁸ It is possible that the work of Richard Bauckham²⁹ might yet lead some to place rather more weight on the claim that the gospel writers based their narratives on direct eyewitness testimony³⁰ and open the door to exploring the unique psychosocial dynamics of

individual healings in future years. But for now, such undertakings, seen, for example, in the influential work of Donald Capps,³¹ can look historically naive and almost pre-critical. Our analysis will have to remain at the level of generality if it is to have historical credibility and so we will work with Norman Perrin's assertion that "we cannot, today, reconstruct a single authentic healing or exorcism narrative from the tradition we have".³² This is a minimalist position but one that can at least allow us to proceed somewhat further with the question.

DID JESUS EVER CURE ANYBODY?

If Jesus was thought to be a healer and exorcist by his contemporaries, it seems reasonable to ask the question posed by John Pilch, "Did Jesus ever cure anybody?"³³ New Testament scholars, almost without exception, would consider this question unacceptable.³⁴ Meier, for example, believes questions about whether miracles actually happened are only legitimate in philosophy or theology and should not concern someone interested in the *historical* Jesus: "they are illegitimate or at least unanswerable in a historical investigation that stubbornly restricts itself to empirical evidence and rational deductions or inferences from such evidence."³⁵ Instead, most would say that questions should be kept modest, and we should limit ourselves to trying to understand what Jesus or his contemporaries meant in Christological terms when they claimed he was a miracle worker, and leave it at that. But, as Meier himself notes, avoiding this question looks disingenuous to everyone but New Testament scholars themselves.³⁶

So it is refreshing that a minority of scholars have, in relatively recent years, been unwilling to leave the question unasked. However, most that have asked it have answered it in the negative. Pilch, for example, answered the question that he posed so candidly with a definitive "No".³⁷ Nonetheless, in saying this,

Pilch does not deny that Jesus *healed* people. In fact, his book on the subject could be said to be, in part, dedicated to explaining how this happened. This apparent contradiction is explicable because for Pilch *curing* and *healing* are not synonyms. *Curing* is “the strategy of destroying or checking a pathogen, removing a malfunctioning or non-functioning organ, restoring a person to health or well-being”,³⁸ whereas *healing* he defines as “the restoration of meaning to life. It is the strategy of restoring social and personal meaning for life problems that accompany human health misfortunes.”³⁹ *Curing*, Pilch maintains, rarely occurs, even with the benefits of modern medicine, while *healing* always occurs, in the sense that “All people ... eventually come to some resolution”⁴⁰ — and, for Pilch, Jesus seems to have been particularly effective at facilitating this process.

In claiming that Jesus *healed* but did not *cure*,⁴¹ Pilch is saying something which, with varying degrees of sophistication, has been said by other New Testament scholars, although without the conceptual rigour he brings to the discussion.⁴² He should be commended for his honesty on this matter and his clarity, as well as his valuable appropriation of perspectives that originate in the field of medical anthropology. Although I am unconvinced by the homogenization of cultures that his particular approach to the “Mediterranean world” entails (for much the same reasons I am unconvinced by the work of Bruce Malina on which he is dependent),⁴³ and I remain perplexed by his assertion that human beings always achieve *healing* (not something I recognise in my own experience), the basic distinction between *healing* and *curing* is obviously an important one.

Nonetheless, there are two ways in which Pilch’s answer to the question he asks about Jesus seems inadequate. Pilch claims to use the New Testament texts in a manner analogous to that of an anthropologist’s “field report”,⁴⁴ and calls on readers to take seriously what anthropologists term *emic* (that is *insider*)

accounts of reality as part of the interpretative process. Yet in what follows, Pilch seems unwilling to engage with the *emic* claims that are made about Jesus. Jesus was not thought by his contemporaries solely to provide resolutions to the social and personal problems of meaning created by *illness* (the social experience of a sickness). He was also thought to cure *disease* (the physical experience of a sickness). Pilch is quite wrong to ignore this. He appears to do so because of his belief that someone can only think in terms of *disease* if they think in terms of contemporary biomedical models, which obviously first-century people did not. Hence, his rather odd assertion that “in the Bible there is no interest at all in disease”.⁴⁵ This is an indefensible position and one that would not be supported by leading medical anthropologists in the field. Arthur Kleinman and Liliang Sung, for example, make it clear in their survey of historical and traditional healthcare systems that these are concerned not just with affecting the meaning of an illness but also with attempts to limit disease.⁴⁶ As we saw at the outset, Jesus’ healings were regarded by his contemporaries as unexpectedly efficacious with tangible consequences: the blind, it is claimed, received their sight, the lame walked, people with leprosy were cleansed, and the deaf heard. These results look to the modern reader, as they would to one of Jesus’ contemporaries, suspiciously like *cures*.

How can such unusual claims be explained? Given the above, it will not do to dismiss them as legendary accretions to our traditions about Jesus. They seem to go too far back and be too widespread in our records for that (hence the unusual consensus amongst scholars that we noted earlier). Of course, for some, the explanation, for the most part, lies in unwitting self-deception on the part of many of those “cured”. They may have been swept up in the exhilaration of events and temporarily ceased to be conscious of their symptoms. Or their belief in the reputation of the healer might have convinced them that their symptoms had

been alleviated when, by any objective assessment, they had not (a well-attested phenomenon).⁴⁷ However, self-deception seems unlikely in most cases. Although it might be possible where a person is suffering from certain chronic, degenerative, biomechanical disorders, it is hard to see how someone with paralysis can forget their symptoms or a blind person see, however swept up they are in events or impressed by a charismatic individual. To label Jesus' cures self-deception seems a crude way of understanding the nature of such experiences. It is also difficult to reconcile with the long-term results that Jesus was claimed to have had. For example, Quadratus, according to Eusebius a disciple of the apostles, wrote an apology to Hadrian in about 125 CE, claiming that:

Our Saviour's works, moreover, were always present: for they were real, consisting of those who had been healed of their diseases, those who had been raised from the dead; who were not only seen whilst they were being healed and raised up, but were afterwards constantly present. Nor did they remain only during the sojourn of the Saviour on earth, but also a considerable time after His departure; and, indeed, some of them have survived even down to our own times. (Quadratus in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.3)

So if such "cures" were not the result of self-deception, can we suggest any alternative explanations?

PSYCHOSOMATIC EXPLANATIONS

For many New Testament scholars, it is not unthinkable that the historical Jesus did indeed *cure* people of diseases as well as heal them of illnesses. Some are, of course, happy to account for this by affirming their belief that Jesus did indeed carry out miraculous cures by supernatural means.⁴⁸ There is a great deal that could be said about this kind of reasoning, but I do think that a couple of points need to be made.

First, scholars should not assume, as Twelftree seems to, that

establishing the historicity of the miracle traditions necessarily implies that Jesus carried out what would usefully be called a miracle by a modern reader. For those in antiquity, a miracle can be best defined, as Harold Remus suggests, as an event that is “perceived to be extraordinary and beyond human capability; ... inexplicable except by attributing it to or associating it in some way with superhuman agency.”⁴⁹ But whilst such a definition might be consonant with perspectives in the early Roman empire, clearly the judgement of a twenty-first-century person on what exactly constituted an event that is inexplicable would be markedly different.

Second, I find it somewhat disingenuous that I have yet to find a biblical scholar who believes that the miracles of Jesus are only explicable in supernatural terms and who also believes that the miracles that allegedly occurred in the shrine of Asklepios should also be ascribed to such a cause, or that the emperor Vespasian’s healings in Alexandria can be explained in such a way.⁵⁰ If someone really wishes to claim supernatural causality in explaining the miracles of Jesus — a claim that would look rather unusual in any other field of historical enquiry — then they should at least be as generous as the historical Jesus appears to have been, and allow for others being able to effect genuine miracles by such means in the first century.⁵¹ In saying this I am not saying anything new. Paul Achtemeier said as much in his 1975 article on the tradition that Jesus healed a boy who suffered from seizures.⁵²

However, most scholars of the New Testament believe that the historical Jesus did indeed cure people of diseases as well as heal them of illnesses but assume that the events were not “miraculous” in the sense that they do not require modern interpreters to believe that what happened in the past is beyond modern, rational explanation, however astonishing and inexplicable they might have been to Jesus’ contemporaries. For

such scholars, Jesus' healings did not "violate the laws of Nature" and therefore were not miracles according to David Hume's familiar criterion. At the core of traditions about the historical Jesus it is claimed are events in which the sick were cured of disorders that were *psychosomatic*, or to use an increasingly common term, *psychophysiologic*, in their origins. That is, the symptoms that were successfully alleviated by the historical Jesus, such as blindness, paralysis, or possession, did not have a physical or organic origin but were the bodily manifestation of intense psychological disturbances.

The notion that the healing miracles and exorcisms of the historical Jesus were of disorders that had psychosomatic aetiologies is often central to arguments made by a broad range of scholars in support of their belief that the historical Jesus was viewed as a healer during his lifetime and for the reliability, at least in general terms, of such traditions. The likely authenticity of these traditions is often contrasted with the likely inauthenticity of the other major category of miraculous activity ascribed to Jesus, the so-called "nature miracles", such as walking on water,⁵³ which are regularly dismissed as patently unhistorical. As David Aune, for example, remarks, "Since most of the healings and exorcisms found in the tradition can be construed as psychosomatic cures, their occurrence is not an *a priori* historical impossibility."⁵⁴ Morton Smith said much the same in his controversial work *Jesus the Magician*,⁵⁵ and similar sentiments are expressed by Robert Funk in a book detailing the findings of the influential Jesus Seminar: "During his lifetime Jesus was considered a healer. From today's perspective, Jesus' cures are related to psychosomatic maladies."⁵⁶ Funk and his notoriously sceptical colleagues even go on to identify six specific healings in the earliest traditions about Jesus that they believe are evidence of this: the healing of Peter's mother-in-law,⁵⁷ the man with "leprosy",⁵⁸ the man with paralysis,⁵⁹ the

woman with a haemorrhage,⁶⁰ an unnamed blind man at Bethsaida,⁶¹ and blind Bartimaeus.⁶² The exorcisms are often singled out as the cures most readily explicable by recourse to psychosomatic explanation.⁶³

Having raised the possibility that psychosomatic explanations can be given for the healing traditions associated with the historical Jesus, most scholars have been unwilling to pursue this idea much further, assuming that the case is self-evident and no more can be gained by following this line of enquiry. An example of this tendency can be seen in Graham Stanton's cautious remark:

Few doubt that Jesus possessed unusual gifts as a healer, though of course varied explanations are offered. Some suggest that many of the illnesses and disabilities had psychosomatic roots. While this may well have been the case, we have no ways of investigating the matter further.⁶⁴

However, rather more sophisticated psychosomatic explanations have begun to emerge, in which scholars have tried to describe and characterise the factors and mechanisms that might have led to the alleviation of the physical symptoms that the historical Jesus encountered. For example, in recent years there has been a growing tendency to interpret possession as a psychosocial disorder caused by the internalisation of oppression, and more specifically the political oppression that the inhabitants of Palestine endured under the Romans, as can be seen in the contributions of John Dominic Crossan and Ched Myers.⁶⁵ A person's anguish at colonial subjugation might become repressed and turned in on itself in a self-destructive manner, as Frantz Fanon argued in his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth*, a study of mental illness during the Algerian revolutionary war against France.⁶⁶ Such a person might manifest abnormal behaviour because it offered a socially acceptable form of protest and rebellion in preference to other, more "sane" and dangerous

options. After all, it is noted, the Gerasene demoniac inflicted violence on *himself*⁶⁷ and the demons in this story, according to the accounts in Mark and Luke, called themselves “Legion”.⁶⁸

Others have seen the ailments as a consequence of the broader economic and social context. Gerd Theissen, for example, notes that the miracles stories:

Present themselves as forms of expression of lower classes, in the simplicity of their theology, the simplicity of their narrative, but above all their subject matter. Belief in miracles is concentrated here on specific situations of distress, on possession, disease, hunger, lack of success and danger, in other words on situations which do not strike as hard in all social groups.⁶⁹

He then goes on to claim that socio-economic factors may have helped create the plethora of possessed individuals that Jesus faced:

While possession as such could not be class-specifically conditioned, its mass appearance could be. In a society which expresses its problems in mythical language, groups under pressure may interpret their situation as threats from demons.⁷⁰

For Theissen, there is a distinct connection between social class and possession. As a result, he can argue that exorcisms challenged more than just demons. Healings and exorcisms are class specific and have class-specific implications.⁷¹

Although the insights of Crossan, Myers, Theissen, and others are suggestive, and should not be dismissed lightly, it is only with the work of Stevan Davies in 1995⁷² that we encounter a sustained and sophisticated examination of the psychosocial characteristics of the healing traditions associated with the historical Jesus by a New Testament scholar. Davies, for example, maintains that those who suffered from specific physical ailments and were cured by the historical Jesus were in fact experiencing “somatisation” or “conversion” disorders.⁷³ A

“somatisation” disorder is a psychiatric disorder that manifests itself in recurrent and multiple physical symptoms. A “conversion” disorder refers more specifically to the impairment of voluntary motor or sensory functions which appears to suggest neurological or other organic causes but is believed to be associated with psychological stressors⁷⁴ (conversion disorders are often classified as somatoform disorders, following the influential *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV*,⁷⁵ but can they can also be thought of as dissociative disorders, as can be seen in the *International Classification of Diseases 10*).⁷⁶ Apart from differences in symptoms, there is actually little that distinguishes conversion disorders and somatisation disorders.⁷⁷ For Davies, the causes that he posits for the physical ailments Jesus allegedly healed provide a cogent reason for his apparent success.

Davies’ treatment of the exorcism traditions is also extremely helpful. He dismisses socio-political or economic explanations of possession, maintaining that they could not have had a socio-political or economic cause because the experiences of colonialism and economic oppression were not actually as intense in first-century Galilee and Judea as the likes of Crossan and Theissen maintain.⁷⁸ “Whatever was happening to cause demon-possession in Galilee it was not discontent with the Roman troops in Judea, nor was it a form of response to indebtedness and taxation.”⁷⁹ Rather he provides two different explanations for its occurrence. He draws upon cross-cultural studies to suggest that “demon-possession is usually a means by which an individual in a socially subordinate role can respond to and cope with circumstances that cannot be effectively dealt with otherwise — most of the time, those circumstances arise from intrafamily conflicts.”⁸⁰ In addition, he also suggests, following a brief analysis of the literature relating to the origins of Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), that sufferers “may have been under

the influence of alter-personae that originated in the past, during childhood, as a defence mechanism resulting from abuse.”⁸¹

Donald Capps is another scholar who has posited more detailed psychophysiological explanations for Jesus’ efficacy as a healer and exorcist, although unlike Davies he is a psychologist of religion rather than a New Testament scholar. His works *Jesus: A Psychological Biography*⁸² and *Jesus the Village Psychiatrist*,⁸³ contain much of value which could be helpful in reconceptualising our understanding of the healing traditions, and employs a far more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between “disease” and “illness” than that assumed by scholars working more strictly within the field of New Testament studies. Indeed, he quite rightly takes to task New Testament scholars, such as Crossan, who have assumed too rigid a dichotomy between “disease” and “illness” as a consequence of their erroneous reading of the influential work of Kleinman.⁸⁴ However, for all its strengths, Capps’ psychophysiological explanations of the healings and exorcisms of Jesus are of limited utility, primarily because they are predicated upon his belief in the veracity of classical psychoanalytical theory. So, for example, he can maintain that “the common element in the cases of persons who were either exorcised or healed was anxiety, a reaction to an externally or internally induced sense of danger, manifesting itself in meaningful symptoms.”⁸⁵ Unless one already has a prior commitment to such psychoanalytical assumptions, some of Capp’s exegesis appears unacceptably speculative. For instance, he says of Jesus’ healing of the paralytic man:

In my view what Jesus has done here is to confront the anxiety of the paralytic man, commanding him not to be undone by perceived dangers (external or internal), but to have confidence that these dangers, whatever they may be, do not warrant an immobilized existence. The command to the man in Mark 2:1-12 to “go to your home” suggests that the perceived danger is located there, either

because he feels threatened at home (e.g. having been treated abusively by his father), or because he is concerned about what he may do to someone at home (e.g. strike his father, take sexual license with a sister).⁸⁶

Despite its creativity, Capps' work has some other failings that make it problematic. His speculations about Jewish physiology and concurrent psychological disorders evince an ahistorical and homogenised understanding of Jewish ethnic and cultural identity through time, retrojecting into the first century CE ideas found in ideologically charged medical discourse that developed at the turn of the 20th century.⁸⁷

Despite the increasing sophistication of the analysis by the likes of Crossan, Theissen, Davies, Capps, and others,⁸⁸ psychophysiological explanations of the healings and exorcisms of the historical Jesus produced to date are of limited value. They may explain *some* of Jesus' success as a healer but they have significant weaknesses.

First, we do not know with any certainty what kind of disorders were suffered by those whom Jesus healed. As has long been noted, the gospels are notoriously short on detailed clinical description and medical terminology (despite the often repeated claim that Luke's gospel was written by the physician of that name mentioned in Colossians 4.14).⁸⁹ When someone is described in these texts as suffering from possession, fever, dysentery, paralysis, blindness, having a flow of blood, a withered hand, leprosy or being "moonstruck", we can only guess what is being described.⁹⁰ The descriptions of the predicaments of those healed adhere to clear oral and redactional conventions in their depiction of symptoms. Diagnosis is a far from easy undertaking, even with the benefit of modern technology — such as blood tests, MRIs, X-rays, CAT scans, and endoscopes — and even when one has a body rather than just a text to hand. Even today, of those deaths that are autopsied in the United States

(approximately 6 per cent) about 40 per cent reveal that the cause of death has been misdiagnosed — a figure that has stayed roughly the same over the last one hundred years.⁹¹ Given that it is so difficult for us to have any real idea of the nature of the symptoms that those seeking healing presented to the historical Jesus, it seems unreasonable to claim that we can know anything much about the specific aetiologies of these complaints (and, of course, a specific symptom, such as blindness, can have a myriad of possible causes, physical, organic as well as psychological). It seems all the more unreasonable to posit a *psychological* cause for a particular ailment when the gospels give us so little insight into the interior life of those that Jesus encountered (so it is hard to know whether they were psychologically conflicted or traumatised in any way). Even if we could trust the records that we have as accurate accounts of historical events, we rarely find anything that can even vaguely approximate to a case history. The closest we seem to get is the occasional reference to the duration of an illness,⁹² and the rare mention of how those seeking healing had failed to achieve it by other means.⁹³

Even where there is an interesting correlation between the kind of symptoms presented by those healed in the gospels and those associated with somatisation and conversion disorders listed in such works as the influential *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*,⁹⁴ such as a loss of voice, deafness, blindness, paralysis, or muscle weakness and excessive menstrual bleeding, this is not in itself conclusive evidence of the presence of a psychosomatic disorder. For example, how can the exegete know whether the paralysed man⁹⁵ suffered from the pseudoneurologic symptoms indicative of a somatisation disorder⁹⁶ or was paralysed because of other far more common congenital or acquired disorders (whether, for example, organic, infective, degenerative, malignant or traumatic in origin)?

Second, from what limited information we can deduce about the

disorders that Jesus encountered, it seems unlikely that their aetiologies were predominantly psychosomatic. The earliest records that we possess of Jesus' healing ministry do not indicate that he gained his reputation by *only healing a small percentage of those that came to him.* Yet, it is clear that if the success of Jesus was limited to those individuals presenting with symptoms that had a psychosomatic basis *alone* surely such a pattern should be discernible in the records. However, only in the tradition about Jesus' healings in Nazareth do we get the indication that Jesus could only heal a few of those that came to him.⁹⁷ The sources also emphasise that a number of the ailments that Jesus cured had been suffered since birth,⁹⁸ so they cannot have had a psychophysiological aetiology. In the light of this, it seems rather unwise of scholars, such as E. P. Sanders, to maintain, "Once one grants that Jesus healed, the prominence of cures of the lame, the dumb and the blind is not surprising. Those diseases respond to faith-healing".⁹⁹

It should be said, at this point, that it most certainly is not the case that demons are assumed to be the major cause of sickness in the New Testament, something which has encouraged some to believe in the likelihood of psychosomatic explanations for Jesus' healings, the logic being that if the explanation for a disorder is itself, from our perspective, something fantastical, then it is all the more likely to indicate an affliction that is not physical in its origins. Darrel Amundsen and Gary Ferngren are right to observe that in most of the healings performed by Jesus not only is there no mention of demonic involvement, but the symptoms are usually clearly distinguished from demonic possession and naturalistic explanations of a person's predicament seem to predominate.¹⁰⁰ The only exception to this appears to be the case of a boy suffering from what seems to be epilepsy,¹⁰¹ a condition that had long been ascribed to demonic causation, as can be seen in the Hippocratic text *On the Sacred Disease*.¹⁰²

THE “MEANING RESPONSE”

If psychosomatic interpretations are not able to explain how the historical Jesus effected cures, is there anything more that can be said? In one sense the psychosomatic explanations, although they fall down in assuming that only those physiological disorders with a psychological aetiology can have been cured by the historical Jesus, at least alert us to the potential relationship between psychological states and physiological disease. And when we examine this more closely it seems quite plausible that the historical Jesus could have been thought to have caused dramatic changes in the course of a wide range of diseases, with diverse aetiologies, whether of a predominately psychological origin or not. Particularly, I maintain, if we recognise his place in generating a particularly powerful form of what the medical anthropologist Daniel Moerman refers to as the “meaning response”¹⁰³ in many of those who sought healing from him.

This is perhaps a rather odd statement to make, which can easily be misunderstood and will require some clarification. Before I do this, I should immediately make it clear that in saying this, I am not making a special case for the historical Jesus. Indeed, our case is dependent, in part, on empirical studies of the efficacy of a range of different forms of non-medical therapeutic interventions of various kinds in diverse cultures¹⁰⁴ and so could be applicable in making sense of claims about the efficacy of other healing traditions in antiquity (such as those associated with shrines of Asklepios).

Moerman’s work is essentially the consequence of trying to explicate what is often referred to as the placebo effect in modern medicine. To date, I have found only one New Testament scholar who has made a direct link between this phenomenon and the healings in the New Testament, Harold Remus,¹⁰⁵ although those studying other epochs have been rather less reticent about making such connections when trying to explain the efficacy of

non-empirically based therapeutic traditions.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately Remus' analysis is somewhat impressionistic and although there is much of value in what he says, it is based in part on the kind of anecdotal data from popularising and somewhat sensational modern texts that bedevils the discussion of this subject, and his work does not appear to have had much effect on assumptions within the field.

The placebo effect is well known in Western societies, as indeed, is its negative corollary, the nocebo effect.¹⁰⁷ Placebos, inert medications or "sham" procedures that can only be effective by the power of suggestion, were, until relatively recently, regularly prescribed by doctors. Indeed, in 1952 it was estimated that approximately 40 per cent of prescriptions given by general practitioners in England were placebos.¹⁰⁸ However, their use has become rather less common in recent decades or, rather, less overt.¹⁰⁹ This decline is partly the result of developments in medical ethics (for example, at the heart of a placebo often lies a deception on the part of the person prescribing it),¹¹⁰ research methodologies (placebo-induced therapeutic changes are those changes that are screened out by those trying to test the efficacy of new treatments rather than studied in their own right),¹¹¹ and the fact that placebos have been tainted by association with various complementary therapies (such therapies are often dismissed as having achieved their success by the placebo effect). But, despite this neglect, we need to remember that the placebo effect is indeed tangible. It is something that is clearly discernible above and beyond that which would be visible as a result of the self-limiting nature of many illnesses or so-called "regression to the mean" (chronic diseases, left to themselves, often wax and wane), and yet cannot be explained as a direct consequence of a specific medication or treatment. Indeed, despite its decline in use in recent years, it is still employed widely by many modern medical practitioners. As David Spiegel says in an edition of the

British Medical Journal, “We cannot afford to dispense with any treatment that works, even if we are not certain how it does.”¹¹²

The degree of efficacy of the placebo effect can be quite dramatic and the range of ailments for which clinical data exists from double-blind randomised controlled trials to demonstrate this is extremely broad. There are plenty of studies that illustrate this.¹¹³ Placebo-induced symptom relief has been reported in an impressively wide range of illnesses, including allergies, angina pectoris, asthma, cancer, cerebral infarction, depression, diabetes, enuresis, neurosis, ocular pathology, Parkinsonism, prostatic hyperplasia, schizophrenia, skin diseases, ulcers, warts, and so on.¹¹⁴ Indeed, as it stands it appears that placebo responses can be seen in most conditions (although the clinical data has tended to be focused, for historical reasons, upon symptoms related to pain). The point to note here is that placebos have been shown to affect not just a patient’s subjective *perception* of a symptom, such as pain, but also bodily processes that are objectively observable and measurable.

It is worth emphasising to those unfamiliar with the literature that such effects are not anecdotal but as much clinical results (however awkward) as those for the drugs or procedures which are being trialled. And we should remember this when we read, for example, that a placebo *alone* has nearly the efficacy of a well-known and effective medication for gastric ulcers, or that a “sham” surgery for a form of coronary heart disease has proven more efficacious than a common procedure¹¹⁵ as have “sham” versions of arthroscopies, a regular treatment for osteoarthritis of the knee.¹¹⁶ The standard claim that the placebo effect is a fixed constant amounting to about 30 per cent of any given treatment effect, based upon the classic study by Henry Beecher published in 1955,¹¹⁷ something that was widely taught for much of the second half of the twentieth century, has quite rightly been shown to be untenable and based upon rather sloppy

research,¹¹⁸ but nonetheless the significance of the placebo effect has become established.¹¹⁹ Although its impact is variable across conditions and contexts, and some have been rather too indiscriminate in their claims,¹²⁰ it is now regarded by most clinicians as demonstrably present in virtually all therapeutic interventions.¹²¹ The only necessary factor is that the intervention is one of which the sufferer (or those about them) is aware.¹²² It is not, as commonly assumed, only effective where the underlying aetiology is a psychological one, an “imagined” illness. As Edzard Ernst observes, “the fact is that hypochondriacs, depressives, individuals with somatic pain *and virtually all other types of patients* can respond to placebo”.¹²³ It is not associated with a particular personality type.¹²⁴ Whether a person responds or not seems “to be primarily determined by the situation or setting” — its effect is not limited to only one small group within a population.¹²⁵ Nor is its effect only on the subjective perception of symptoms, such as pain; objective measurements of various bodily processes have established its capacity to change other aspects of the course of a disease. Nor does its effect appear to be transient.¹²⁶

Perhaps a useful way of demonstrating the potential efficacy of the placebo effect is to look at what could be described as the other side of the same phenomenon — the nocebo effect.¹²⁷ In its most extreme form, known as “voodoo death” or “hex death”, belief in the power of a curse can lead to the death of an individual — a phenomenon found in a range of cultures present in Europe, Latin America, Africa, the Pacific, Caribbean and Australasia — and famously presented in an article by Walter Cannon more than eighty years ago.¹²⁸ Within a short period of being declared “socially dead” (something that usually happens to people after biological death, through the rituals associated with a funeral) the individual dies, not as a consequence of any physical act by those that have cursed them but as a consequence

of the powerful combined efficacy of the beliefs, values, fears, anxieties and expectations of the community within which they lived.¹²⁹

Claude Lévi-Strauss described such a case:

Shortly thereafter sacred rites are held to dispatch him to the realm of shadows. First brutally torn from all his family and social ties and excluded from all functions and activities through which he experienced self-awareness, then banished by the same forces from the world of the living, the victim yields to the combined terror, the sudden total withdrawal of the multiple reference systems provided by the support of the group, and finally the group's decisive reversal in proclaiming him — once a living man, with rights and obligations — dead and an object of fear, ritual and taboo.¹³⁰

But while the consequences of the placebo effect are well known and clinically demonstrable, the expression “placebo effect” is unfortunate and employed carelessly for a broad range of phenomena, leading to calls to abandon it from medical anthropologists as well as clinicians and medical researchers.¹³¹ The expression focuses undue attention on the substance or procedure prescribed as the placebo — the one thing that does not cause the placebo effect is the placebo itself, which is, by definition, inert — rather than the complex interaction of biology and meaning in human life that produces its effect, something that plays a significant part in *any* therapeutic intervention. As Cecil Helman notes:

In medical anthropology, the concept of “placebo effect” is not confined only to medications, to chemically inactive substances used in double-blind studies. It includes any “pill, potion or procedure”¹³² where belief plays an important part. This is because all forms of healing — whether medical or non-medical, orthodox or complementary, modern or traditional — make use of this phenomenon to some extent.¹³³

The placebo clearly tells us something remarkable and puzzling

about the capacity for human beings to activate, through the power of knowledge, symbols and their associated meanings, a rich and complex repertoire of healing processes by which they may be able to “heal” themselves.

Exactly how this effect comes about and what factors facilitate it has been the subject of study by a number of medical anthropologists and healthcare professionals over the last forty years.¹³⁴ There have been a range of reasons for this growth in scholarship (which rather paradoxically has coincided with a decline in the use of placebos) but at least part of the motivation for this interest is the increasing desire to translate knowledge about this phenomenon into improved outcomes for patients.

However, it is with Moerman’s work that the role of the person *healed* and the significance of meaning in causing these beneficial physiological changes has finally been given centre stage,¹³⁵ and the effect examined independently of the conceptual confusion that is caused by the emphasis on the placebo itself. Moerman’s work provides us with the most thorough analysis of the phenomenon to date and hence I will make use of it in what follows.

For Moerman the “meaning response” can be created by a number of factors and can be induced a range of actions and behaviours within specific micro and macro contexts (micro-context here refers to the specific setting of a healing, and macro-context to its location within a broader culture). Context, is, of course, vital, although not completely determinative (and certainly the “clinical encounter”, the micro context, should not be given undue prominence).¹³⁶

Let us briefly look at some of those elements that are known to combine to constitute the “meaning response” and affect its efficacy before returning to the conundrum of Jesus’ cures.

(1) *Knowledge*. What people know, or think they know, about a disease or medicine or therapeutic intervention of some kind

can enhance both the autonomous healing of their bodies (the organic response of immunological and related systems) and also behavioural responses (the things they do to enhance their own healing or to assist someone else's). It is important to note that this knowledge is not knowledge of empirical reality, it does not need, by modern biomedical standards to be "true", it is just necessary for the individual or group to believe that it is. It needs to be true within the shared cultural script, the macro-context that validates such understandings¹³⁷ (although such scripts are dynamic and always open to change and individual interpretations of them may well be affected by the consequences of the therapeutic encounter itself).¹³⁸ So, for example, volunteers in a trial in which some were given placebos that were inscribed with the name of a famous analgesic perceived their sham medication to be only slightly less effective in combating headaches than those given the real medication only without the customary branding (and significantly more so than those given the placebo without the branding).¹³⁹ The widespread "knowledge" of the efficacy of the specific brand and the general belief in the potency of healing chemicals (something Helman notes is "an essential component of Western forms of the placebo effect")¹⁴⁰ were evidently central factors in explaining the results.

(2) *Therapeutic agent*. The "meaning response" is not just dependent upon the patient and their knowledge, the therapist is also crucial as an agent. In particular, *confidence*, or the appearance of confidence, on the part of the healer in their ability to do something effective, especially when a patient shares this confidence in them and their actions, has a demonstrable influence on long-term outcomes. Of course, the importance of the way that a doctor presents themselves in healing has been known for a long time — at least since Hippocrates and Galen.¹⁴¹ As Galen reportedly remarked, "he cures most successfully in

whom the people have the most confidence.”¹⁴² The healing power of the words of a therapist is something widely acknowledged in classical literature, including Plato.¹⁴³ W. R. Houston’s famous address to the American College of Physicians in 1938 spelt this out clearly when he called for “the doctor himself, as a therapeutic agent, [to] be refined and polished to make himself a more potent agent”.¹⁴⁴ A description of a doctor from George Bernard Shaw’s 1911 play *The Doctor’s Dilemma* illustrates, albeit humorously, this well-known aspect of medicine through the ages, “Cheering, reassuring, healing by the mere incompatibility of disease or anxiety with his welcome presence. Even broken bones, it is said, have been known to unite at the sound of his voice.”¹⁴⁵

(3) *Form*. Although the content of an intervention, the biomedical potential of the prescription or procedure, is obviously important, the *form* of the intervention and its culturally specific symbolic associations are also vital. It is well known and experimentally verified, for example, that the colour of a medication makes a difference to its effectiveness and the outcome of a treatment. So, for instance, stimulant medications tend to be marketed as red, orange, or yellow tablets in Europe and North America, while depressants or tranquillizers tend to be marketed in blue, green, or purples¹⁴⁶ (blue placebo sedatives have been shown to be three times as effective as the same substance coloured pink).¹⁴⁷ This might sound somewhat inconsequential but it illustrates the vital effect of culture in the interpretation of the form of an intervention and its subsequent efficacy. What is true of coloured medication is also true of the rituals and techniques associated with healing. Placebos administered by injections are, for example, particularly efficacious.¹⁴⁸ It may be odd to think in this way, but pills and needles are, in one sense, ritual symbols, and, as Helman notes:

Most forms of healing, in different communities, employ a whole

cluster of these symbols, they may not be only specific objects, equipment, documents, decorations, but also certain standardized types of body language, movement, posture, dance, clothing, speech and sound.¹⁴⁹

In saying this it is important to note that this does not require the patient to share the same understanding of the intervention or the key symbols as the therapist — such things can have powerful meanings by virtue of being reinscribed in the patient's own cultural script. For example, whilst a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine may use symbols that reference and evoke tradition to effect a cure, the Western consumer may consume these symbols not as “traditional” but as “exotic”, yet the weight placed on the significance of the “exotic” within their own script may result in the symbols having an equally significant effect. Many of the most enthusiastic advocates of the efficacy of acupuncture in the West have little grasp of the system of Chinese medicine underlying it and indeed, in one famous study, it was shown that when acupuncture was administered in a manner that deliberately did not cohere with the underlying assumptions of that particular therapy, it was equally efficacious.¹⁵⁰

(4) *Expectancy*. Anticipations of one's own reactions to various situations and behaviours are important in understanding therapeutic outcomes, as Irving Kirsch and Lynne Weixel have demonstrated.¹⁵¹ As are the expectations of those around you. However, there are many cases where the efficacy of the “meaning response” does not seem to involve any expectation on the part of the recipient — people respond to what things mean whether they “expect” them or not.¹⁵²

The work of Moerman is almost totally unknown to New Testament scholars¹⁵³ and none have related it in any direct way to what we know about the healings and exorcisms of Jesus. Certainly no one, to date, has made a connection between

“meaning response” and the apparent efficacy of the historical Jesus’ activities. Few, other than Remus, have even raised the question in relation to the narrower and less useful notion of placebo. But from what we have just seen, there seem to be good reasons for thinking that this may prove a fruitful area of investigation. A number of historically defensible characteristics of the healing stories associated with Jesus of Nazareth can be correlated with factors that might well have combined to create effective “meaning responses” on the part of those healed. The prior “knowledge” of Jesus by those seeking healing, Jesus’ confidence in his efficacy as a therapeutic agent, the form of healing he employed, and the expectations of those who sought him out, together would have helped him achieve his dramatic results.

(1) *Knowledge*. Knowledge of Jesus and the kind of healing he offered seems important to the healing and exorcism stories. His healings were equated by many of his contemporaries, from early in the tradition, with the famous and efficacious miracle traditions of Israel, notably those of the eschatological figure Elijah,¹⁵⁴ and the healings and exorcisms were probably understood by a number in the context of apocalyptic beliefs of some kind, as evidence of the arrival of the Kingdom of God and, perhaps, the abolition of death and disease that some thought would accompany it.¹⁵⁵ This expectation on occasion seems to have been related to messianic ideas.¹⁵⁶ Such associations created a specific and efficacious “knowledge” about Jesus in the eyes of those who sought healing. Although in saying this we should also be aware that the acclamation “Son of David”, which is often associated with his healings may not reveal messianic expectations on the part of those seeking healing but may well be a reference to Solomon, the “Son of David” widely believed to have power over the demons and celebrated in both popular literature, such as the *Testament of Solomon*, and countless amulets

from the period¹⁵⁷ — but if this is the case, this too would form a particularly efficacious form of “knowledge” about Jesus and his therapeutic activity.

It is also the case that if we rid ourselves of the assumption that people whose religious identities are not given or implied are Jesus’ co-religionists, if we take seriously the alleged locations of the healings and the alleged origins of the crowds that came for healing,¹⁵⁸ then non-Jews who sought out cures, for themselves or others, such as the Syrophoenician woman¹⁵⁹ or the centurion,¹⁶⁰ were not necessarily exceptions amongst those who encountered Jesus. Although we must be careful not to exaggerate the degree of ethnic diversity within Galilee, the key region within which the historical Jesus operated,¹⁶¹ it was not isolated, and road networks allowed for far more cultural interchange than is often assumed,¹⁶² and such encounters are particularly common when people are motivated by a desire for health. For such people, the “knowledge” of Jesus would not be produced and enhanced by interpreting what they knew of his activity through the symbols of prophethood or messiahship but would consist primarily of his reputation refracted through, from their perspective, his particular Jewish exoticism. This seems to have been the case for those gentiles who made use of the Syrian exorcist from Palestine recorded by Lucian¹⁶³ or Eleazar the exorcist who performed in Vespasian’s court,¹⁶⁴ or, although somewhat later, the members of John Chrysostom’s congregation who sought out purveyors of Jewish amulets whenever they fell sick, much to his annoyance.¹⁶⁵

(2) *Therapeutic agent.* Jesus’ efficacy was likely enhanced by the confidence in his abilities that his contemporaries believed he displayed.¹⁶⁶ It seems probable, from the “Q” traditions that began this piece, in which Jesus holds up his healings as evidence of his status as the one expected (in language almost identical to the Dead Sea Scrolls fragment 4Q521),¹⁶⁷ and his exorcisms

too as proof of the arrival of the Kingdom of God,¹⁶⁸ that the historical Jesus thought of himself as bringing about God's intervention in history. No doubt his confidence stemmed from such a distinctive conviction, whatever its specific implications. Whether this self-belief was present at the outset, or developed over time, in a virtuous circle, fed by the growing confidence expressed by the crowds, it is, of course, impossible to know. Indeed, it is possible that the perspective of those seeking healing did not necessarily correlate with Jesus' own self-perception, something that might account for the "reluctance" motif associated with some miracles.¹⁶⁹ We should keep in mind the sobering remarks made by Henry Cadbury many years ago, which are as relevant now:

Probably much that is commonly said about the general purpose of Jesus' life and the specific place in that purpose of detailed incidents is modern superimposition upon a nearly patternless life and upon nearly patternless records of it.¹⁷⁰

However, whilst we cannot know for certain how and when Jesus began to think of himself as an effective healer, it is clear that the perception of others seems to have grown exponentially. Even if the New Testament accounts exaggerate the speed at which Jesus' reputation grew to heighten his significance, the fact that he established such an enduring and widespread reputation as a healer in what amounted to a brief period of activity by whatever reckoning, is telling — and would have impacted significantly on the efficacy of his therapeutic interventions.

(3) *Form*. The form of Jesus' healing is also important. There is some evidence that Jesus used techniques associated with folk practices at the time, such as the use of spittle,¹⁷¹ and employed terminology and actions familiar from the work of other healers and exorcists, such as commanding demons to be silent or to come out of a victim,¹⁷² discovering the name of a demon,¹⁷³ refusing to allow a demon to return to a victim,¹⁷⁴ and on one

occasion, forcing demons to relocate to another host, a herd of pigs.¹⁷⁵ This much was established by Samuel Eitrem long ago,¹⁷⁶ with reference to the Greek Magical Papyri and other sources (notably Lucian and Philostratus). However, when compared to the complex behaviour of other healers and exorcists of his day, such as Eleazar the exorcist described by Josephus,¹⁷⁷ it is surprising how little evidence of such customary practices is present in the traditions about Jesus. Graham Twelftree goes too far in saying that “in his exorcisms Jesus is reported to have availed himself of standard formulas or incantations used by the exorcists of ancient magic”¹⁷⁸ — the language employed in the accounts is far too brief and lacks the usual characteristics of such material. The use of Aramaic in healing narratives¹⁷⁹ may well be explained by either Mark or his source believing that it was sufficiently exotic to merit being an “incantation” but as Paul Achtemeier rightly observes, these words could hardly have been uttered by the historical Jesus, an Aramaic speaker, with that intention.¹⁸⁰ There are no obvious incantations present in the traditions about Jesus. One only needs to compare what is in the New Testament with, for example, the incantation recommended by Cato the Elder for mending a dislocated hip:

A dislocation can be remedied with this chant. Take a green reed, about four or five feet long, split it down the middle, and have two men hold it against their hips. Begin to chant: *motas vaeta daries dardares astataries dissunapiter*. Continue until the two halves of the reed come together. Wave an iron knife over the reed. When the halves have joined and are touching one another, take the reed in your hand and cut it on the right and on the left. Fasten it to the dislocation or fracture, which will the heal. Continue to chant every day: *huat ista pista sista dannabo danaustra*. Or: *haut haut haut istasis tarsis ardannabou dannaustra*.¹⁸¹

As a result, it seems that the historical Jesus was different to many of his contemporaries. For some, interpreting his activity

from a Jewish perspective, he may have appeared as someone who healed by means more akin to the practices of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, a particularly efficacious group, as we have noted. For others, his technique would have at the very least transmitted an unusual sense of authority.

(4) *Expectancy*. The “faith” of both those healed and those around them who anticipated healing, is a well-known motif in many of the healing and exorcism narratives associated with Jesus. Although the individual gospel writers clearly had different ideas about how this was to be understood, it seems present in a sufficient number of narratives to lead us to assume that it was a recurring characteristic of many of the original healings and exorcisms. Indeed, we hear, for example, of the rather awkward (and probably authentic) tradition that Jesus could not heal very many in his home town of Nazareth because of a lack of faith.¹⁸² Faith in Jesus’ power to heal or the expectation that he will heal is not only present in numerous summary passages in the gospels¹⁸³ but is a vital element to such early traditions as the story of the centurion’s servant,¹⁸⁴ the healing of a man with “leprosy”,¹⁸⁵ the man with paralysis,¹⁸⁶ Jairus’ daughter,¹⁸⁷ the woman with a haemorrhage,¹⁸⁸ the man with a withered hand,¹⁸⁹ the Syrophenician woman’s daughter,¹⁹⁰ the boy who suffered from seizures,¹⁹¹ and blind Bartimaeus.¹⁹² Indeed, as Kleinman and Sung noted, the belief of a person seeking healing on behalf of someone else can also have beneficial effects,¹⁹³ something that might also help elucidate the small number of healings in the early Christian traditions where Jesus does not meet the person healed, notably the centurion’s servant¹⁹⁴ and the Syrophenician woman’s daughter.¹⁹⁵

CONCLUSION

So, in brief, it seems likely that the historical Jesus was believed to have cured people but, from what we can tell, it seems unlikely

that such cures were restricted to psychosomatic maladies. Moerman's concept of "meaning response" may help us to go some way to explain his unusual and striking efficacy across a range of ailments with different aetiologies. It cannot explain everything. The historical data is so sparse, and, far from being analogous to the "field reports" that Pilch claims, we are faced with highly formulaic renderings of traditions that cannot bear individual, close, scrutiny for our historical purposes.¹⁹⁶ However, Moerman's approach does give a possible explanation that is rather better than any other non-supernatural interpretation of the historical events that have been proffered before, and offers us the chance to put our understanding of this aspect of the historical Jesus' ministry on a rather surer footing. At the very least I hope it will make New Testament scholars think twice before rather glibly deciding that the efficacy of Jesus' miracles can be explained by the psychosomatic nature of the ailments that were presented to him — an argument that I noted at the outset actually plays a significant but little examined role in the historical judgements of key scholars of the historical Jesus.

Intriguingly though, using the perspective of Moerman to make sense of the conundrum of Jesus' healing miracles may lead us to a significantly different perspective on these events and on the figure of Jesus himself. Although the historicity of the incident is impossible to establish, it is, perhaps, unsurprising to discover that in the earliest account of the story of the healing of a woman with a haemorrhage, it is *she* and not Jesus that brings the healing about. Although in Matthew's Gospel it requires Jesus to discover who has touched him and to acknowledge her faith before the woman is healed,¹⁹⁷ in the earliest version found in Mark, and also in the Lukan account,¹⁹⁸ the haemorrhage ceases as soon as the woman manages to touch Jesus — he has no conscious part to play in the matter. Perhaps this is not as odd as

it sometimes appears. The historical Jesus may not have been as central to his healings as is often assumed. The primary agency may well have often resided with the sick rather than the healer. After all, in most cases, it is those that need healing that seek out Jesus in the gospels rather than the other way around. If we take Moerman's perspective onboard then the person healed ceases to be a passive recipient of healing from Jesus. Rather, through their "meaning response" to the historical Jesus, those healed uncorked the powerful "internal pharmacopoeia which all humans possess as a biologically programmed tool for self-healing".¹⁹⁹ At the very least, it takes two to make a "miracle" (and often, when the complexity of the psychosocial context is properly addressed, considerably more than that).

Notes

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7. Matt 12.24, Mark 3.22, Luke 11.15.
8. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiae* 4.3.1–2.
9. Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae* 18.63–64.
10. James Carleton Paget, “Some Observations on Josephus and Christianity,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 52.2 (2001): 539–624, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/52.2.539>.
11. Mark 9.38, Luke 9.49.
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13. Justin J. Meggitt, “Magic, Healing and Early Christianity: Consumption and Competition,” in *Meanings of Magic: From the Bible to Buffalo Bill*, ed. Amy Wygant (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2006), 89–114.
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17. Stevan L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance and the Origins of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1995), 15.
18. Josephus, *A.J.* 8.45–48.
19. Lucian, *Philopseudes* 16, 11.
20. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.68.
21. For example, see Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, eds., *Asclepius: Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Gerald D. Hart, *Asclepius: The God of Medicine* (London: Royal Society of Medicine, 2000); Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, *Truly beyond Wonders: Aelius Aristides and the Cult of Asclepius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
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33. John J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 142.
34. Though cf. Harold Remus, *Jesus as Healer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 104–18.
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36. Meier, *Mentor, Message and Miracles*, 511.
37. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 142.
38. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 153.
39. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 155.
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42. For example, John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 82; Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 293–304.

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45. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 76.
46. Arthur Kleinman and Liliang H. Sung, "Why Do Indigenous Practitioners Successfully Heal?," *Social Science & Medicine. Part B: Medical Anthropology, Special Issue: Parallel Medical Systems: Papers from a Workshop on "The Healing Process"* 13.1 (1979): 7–26, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7987\(79\)90014-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7987(79)90014-0).
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56. Funk and Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus*, 530–31.
57. Matt 8.14–15, Mark 1.29–31, Luke 5.38–39.
58. Matt 8.1–4, Mark 1.40–45, Luke 5.12–16, *Papyrus Egerton* 2.1–4. The nature of the disease is unclear but was unlikely to be what is known as leprosy today as Hansen's disease is not present in the osteoarchaeological data for the region in this period.
59. Matt 9.1–8, Mark 2.1–12, Luke 5.17–26.

60. Matt 9.20–22, Mark 5.24b–34, Luke 8.42b–48.
61. Mark 8.22–26.
62. Matt 20.29–34, Mark 10.46–52, Luke 18.35–43.
63. For example, Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 159.
64. Stanton, “Message and Miracles,” 67. See also Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 256.
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70. Theissen, *The Miracle Stories*, 250.
71. Theissen, *The Miracle Stories*, 251.
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 82. Capps, *Jesus: A Psychological Biography*.
 83. Capps, *Jesus the Village Psychiatrist*.
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CHAPTER 3.

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Despite a myriad of explorations in fiction and film, and its central importance in much Christian popular piety and theological reflection,¹ the psychology of the historical Jesus has not been something that has attracted serious interest from New Testament scholars. Indeed, most do not consider it a legitimate area of study. Such is the strength of feeling on this issue, that those who do venture into this field find themselves and their work consigned to the periphery of scholarly debate and their interest treated as unhistorical and speculative. It is no surprise, for example, that the fullest discussion of the subject in recent decades appeared in the journal *Pastoral Psychology* (2002), not in a journal for the study of the New Testament. As we shall see, this failure is not quite what it appears to be. For all their protestations, most scholars of the historical Jesus do in fact address psychological questions of a kind, although they have a long way to go before they begin to produce works that are, psychologically speaking, very illuminating or defensible.

Despite the paucity of writing in this area, some things can be said about the psychology of the historical Jesus. But before we suggest what these might be, it is important that we look at why there has been such a reluctance to undertake this in a formal way. This is a particularly perplexing state of affairs given that (1) Albert Schweitzer, whose publications have done so much to shape the history and preoccupations of scholars examining the historical Jesus, dedicated a book directly to this subject as long

ago as 1913;² (2) the exponential growth in recent years in the number of publications by scholars of the New Testament that claim to apply social sciences to its interpretation;³ and (3) the myriad of confident reconstructions of the life of the historical Jesus that have appeared since the beginning of the so-called “Third Quest” in the mid-1980s.⁴ All these factors indicate that the situation should have been very different.

The reason for the absence of studies of the psychology of Jesus is more or less self-evident to most New Testament scholars. For the overwhelming majority, psychology and biblical studies just do not mix. For example, David Horrell’s collection of essays on social-scientific approaches to the New Testament contains virtually nothing from a psychological perspective.⁵ As Gerd Theissen has observed, “the rejection of any combination of psychology and exegesis is often presented with ... disarming obviousness.”⁶ However, if we look more closely at the grounds for this common assumption, it becomes clear that objections are rather weak and the actual practices and concerns of a number of scholars who examine the historical Jesus are not as distinct from those of psychology as are often thought.

For many, the problems of using psychology to examine the historical Jesus are of a general kind that could equally be applicable to the study of the psychology of any historical figure. N. T. Wright’s comments are typical of many:

Such attempts are made from time to time, but have not carried much conviction. After all, as pastors, psychiatrists and psychotherapists know, it is hard enough to understand the inner workings of someone’s psyche (even supposing we could define such a thing with any precision) when they share one’s own culture and language and when they co-operate with the process and answer one’s questions. How much harder when none of these things are the case.⁷

Few raising such objections are aware that the strengths and

weaknesses of psychohistory have been discussed for some decades, at least since Eric Erikson's famous study of Luther was published in the 1950s.⁸ Although psychohistory may have fallen out of favour amongst many English-speaking historians,⁹ it does not mean that such an approach is self-evidently unreasonable, as Wright and others assume.¹⁰ At the very least scholars such as Wright would benefit from familiarising themselves with current debates around psychohistorical analysis¹¹ so that their criticisms are somewhat more informed.

Some object to the psychological study of the historical Jesus on grounds that are more specific to the figure of Jesus. For a number there is a theological objection (whether stated or not) that stems from the fear that somehow such a psychological approach will relativise the theological claims of either the text of the Bible or the figure of Jesus himself, through appeal to factors and processes that are all too human.¹² Indeed, such an enquiry might reveal "imperfection, inadequacy, and weakness".¹³ Objections of this kind are not sustainable not least because, if the basis upon which they are made is taken seriously, any study of the *historical* Jesus, not just those that are concerned with psychological questions, would be impossible. However, the most common complaint specific to the study of the psychology of the historical Jesus is that the sources of our knowledge of Jesus cannot bear the weight of psychological scrutiny. The processes by which the New Testament came to be have led most to doubt the ability of even the earliest records of Jesus to give access to the man himself.¹⁴ Although it is now customary for scholars of the historical Jesus to claim certain isolated "facts" about the life of Jesus can be determined with a reasonable level of certainty through the application of generally agreed historical criteria (for example, Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist or Jesus' death on a Roman cross), these are not of the kind that

can be subject to psychological scrutiny without a scholar being accused of engaging in an indefensible level of speculation.¹⁵

Yet, despite their protestations, most New Testament scholars do have something to say about the psychology of the historical Jesus, even if they do not use the language of psychology in articulating it.¹⁶ They often operate with “common-sense” assumptions about “human nature” that play a crucial part in various aspects of their reconstructions, which often, incidentally, give them a false confidence in their speculations.¹⁷ There is one particular preoccupation of Jesus scholarship on which most New Testament scholars have something to say and in which we can see them most obviously engaging in amateur psychology of a kind: they have been happy to speculate, at least to a certain degree, about the motivations and objectives of the historical Jesus, in order to say something, however limited, about his self-understanding.¹⁸ Indeed, Wright criticises those who try to study the psychology of the historical Jesus in the context of his own attempt to justify his extremely bold speculations about Jesus’ awareness that he was embodying God’s return to Zion.¹⁹ To date, the question of Jesus’ self-understanding often consists of rather arid discussions over whether the historical Jesus could have affirmed a variety of apparently conflicting identities for himself or what incident his life might be considered a “turning point” in his self-awareness. The speculations are rather impoverished by this allergy to psychology, and as for all the talk of self-understanding, there has been little reflection on what exactly constitutes the understanding of selfhood within the context of Jesus’ day.

Some, of course, have ventured to say rather more about the psychology of Jesus, despite the reservations of their colleagues.²⁰ But, for various reasons, work in this area has yet to achieve a great deal. Much time, for example, has been expended debating whether it is reasonable to classify the historical Jesus

as suffering from a mental illness of some kind (the focus, for example, of Albert Schweitzer's contribution). This is a legitimate area to examine; after all it seems likely that the historical Jesus was thought to be mad by some of his contemporaries, including his own family.²¹ A number also thought him possessed, a designation that indicated that they believed that he exhibited behavioural abnormalities.²² Indeed, John's gospel even records a tradition that Jesus was thought to be suicidal²³ (although this was not thought to necessarily be an indication of mental illness in this period). And, as I have argued elsewhere,²⁴ I think it is reasonable to interpret Jesus' treatment by the Romans, so reminiscent of that experienced by his "insane" near contemporaries Carabas²⁵ and Jesus ben Ananias,²⁶ as providing sufficient grounds for concluding that he was ridiculed and put to death by those who believed him to be out of his senses. But although it seems reasonable to pursue this question, much of the serious work on Jesus' mental health was undertaken early in the twentieth century, and our understanding of mental illness has moved on considerably since then, rendering its results of little value. For example, until relatively recently there seems to have been little awareness that "madness" as a label is often deployed as an attempt to enforce cultural notions of normality. Although, socially speaking, it is reasonable that some of Jesus' contemporaries could well have interpreted his actions and teachings as "mad" because they seem to have been at variance with many of their assumptions and practices (albeit still within the broad possibilities of first-century Judaism), attempts to engage in a retrospective diagnosis of an organic mental disorder seem peculiarly naïve and crude.

Not much work has been undertaken since this flurry of activity nearly a century ago, despite the enormous shift in our thinking about the nature of psychology. However, the contributions of two scholars stand out, notably those of John W.

Miller and Donald Capps. Although their impact on mainstream biblical studies has been negligible, it is instructive to briefly examine how they have tried to tackle the question of the psychology of the historical Jesus before making a few suggestions of my own.

Of the two, Miller's seems to be the more critically astute work, produced by someone who has a significant reputation within the field of biblical studies. He has argued that the bare outline of Jesus' life, discernible through the application of conventional historical-critical method, can give us sufficient data to allow us to engage in some kind of psychological scrutiny of the man.²⁷ Indeed, such information cries out for psychological analysis — particularly of a developmental kind. The outline of Jesus' life before the beginning of his ministry is summarised by Miller in the following way:

[The gospels] inform us that he was born into a certain kind of family and place and for many years worked at a certain occupation, and that it was not until he was "about thirty" that he left home for the Jordan, where he was baptized by a certain type of man and then experienced certain "temptations" — and that not even then did he launch his own unique mission, but only after the one who had him baptized was arrested.²⁸

Miller brings a number of approaches to bear in examining this outline, but perhaps the most striking is his use of Daniel Levinson's *The Seasons of a Man's Life*,²⁹ in which it is argued that there is a definite developmental pattern of specific, age-linked phases that affect the lives of all men, shaping behaviour and governing emotional states and attitudes. For Miller, the age at which Jesus began his ministry (recorded in Luke to be "about thirty")³⁰ is a crucial period of crisis and transformation for men in general, a period of generative and vocational urgency that explains much about the motivation and form, if not the content, of Jesus' ministry (particularly when other biographical factors

are taken into account, such as the loss of his father and his close association with his “mentor” John the Baptist).

Capps provides a rather more complex and speculative attempt at psychohistory, one which is rather less reticent about applying diagnostic labels to the historical Jesus.³¹ In particular, he emphasises the formative significance of Jesus’ early experience as a fatherless son with a devalued mother. For Capps, this not only caused Jesus to develop into a melancholic depressive with a diffused identity but also drove him to resolve his conflict in one consummate, symbolic action in the temple, in which he both purified his mother and affirmed God as his father.

Both these studies, Capps’ more so than Miller’s, can be criticised at the level of exegetical detail and their theoretical assumptions could strike many as rather problematic. For example, given the significant difference between life expectancy in the Roman empire³² and that today, it seems odd for Miller to argue for the helpfulness of Levinson’s insights about the importance of the age-thirty transition (which are derived from the study of contemporary North Americans) for understanding Jesus. However, the real difficulty with these accounts of the psychology of the historical Jesus lies in the amount that they rely upon the narrative outline of Jesus’ life as presented in the canonical gospels. Historically speaking, it is customary to be extremely suspicious of this.³³ For example, even an event as redolent with potential for making sense of the psychology Jesus as the incident in the temple, something that Capps believes resolved Jesus’ conflicted identity, is hard to place in the chronology of Jesus’ life with any certainty. Did it, for example, occur at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (as recorded in the Gospel of John)³⁴ or at the end (as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels)?³⁵ Indeed, we should keep in mind the sobering

remarks made by Henry Cadbury many years ago, which are as relevant now:

Probably much that is commonly said about the general purpose of Jesus' life and the specific place in that purpose of detailed incidents is modern superimposition upon a nearly patternless life and upon nearly patternless records of it.³⁶

Even if it does prove possible to distinguish a plausible pattern in the life of Jesus we should also be aware of the likelihood that what has been discovered is not something that can allow us to explore the psychological development of Jesus' self-understanding. It may, for example, only tell us something about the historical Jesus' strategy of progressive self-disclosure.³⁷

So, to date, the study of the psychology of the historical Jesus remains in its infancy, still a marginal and problematic undertaking, with little work of value yet done. But, nonetheless, there are some things that can be said. Although these are of a rather general kind, and rather limited in scope, they may provide the basis for further, more fruitful work. Even those who have been dismissive of psychological scrutiny of the historical Jesus, such as Günther Bornkamm who rejected it as "regressive" and "doomed to failure",³⁸ have felt that critical examination of the sources can yield some things about Jesus' "personality", an area in which we can make some useful headway. We can know the kind of person the historical Jesus was.

My optimism in this area should come as no surprise. The personality of Jesus left a clear impression on the earliest believers, so much so that it became a basis for some of their ethical thinking and practice. Paul, for example, could entreat the Corinthians "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ"³⁹ — and assume that the recipients of his letter knew that Jesus was indeed "meek" and "gentle" (whatever those terms might mean). In particular, the virtues that Jesus' exhibited in the face of death, of both forbearance and submission to God, and his refusal to

return violence with violence, seem to have been recurring motifs in the pictures of Jesus that emerge from these traditions and tell us something about the enduring impression his personality made on his followers:

Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour. For Christ did not please himself; but as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." (Rom 15.2–3)

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example, so that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth." When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. (1 Pet 2.21–3)

In saying that we can know about the "personality" of Jesus, I am not arguing that we should make anything much of the direct descriptions of Jesus' emotions in our sources, even though these can reveal such things as Jesus' anger, compassion or love.⁴⁰ The textual traditions behind such details seem too unreliable,⁴¹ and it is frankly too hard for a modern reader to make any real sense of what is actually being described. For example, there is little evidence of early Christian documents being at all concerned with "introspection", even when they talk about states that seem to have an internal origin (such as compassion) there is no idea of subjective and reflective introspection inherent in the emotion. As Klaus Berger puts it, there is, in the understanding of emotions in the New Testament, a lack of the "subjective middle" between reason and ecstasy.⁴²

Rather, we are on more solid ground if we try to determine what kind of personality is implied in the general praxis and preaching of the historical Jesus, drawing our conclusions from data that is more historically defensible. For example, even if critics disagree over the authenticity of particular parables, it is a

striking feature of our sources that the teaching form associated with the historical Jesus is one that is open-ended and essentially metaphorical in character. Cannot we deduce something about the character of Jesus from this? What kind of person could choose such a means of conveying their ideas? Just how authoritarian, for example, could the historical Jesus have been? Similarly, Jesus seems to have been thought of by his contemporaries as a successful healer and exorcist of some kind (even if the reasons for his success were a matter of contention),⁴³ and Jesus seems to have shared such an estimation of himself.⁴⁴ Indeed, as John P. Meier notes, “Put dramatically, but with not too much exaggeration: if the miracle tradition from Jesus’ public ministry were to be rejected *in toto* as unhistorical, so should every other Gospel tradition about him.”⁴⁵ The actual practice of healing seems to have been more visceral than is often assumed and may have involved some kind of sympathetic aspect to it, in which Jesus took on the illnesses which he cured.⁴⁶ Cannot we infer from this something about his character? Similarly, it seems that Jesus’ ministry was characterised by what John Dominic Crossan has termed “open commensality”, a radical form of social praxis that disturbed social expectations and conventions that Jesus persisted with despite attracting ridicule.⁴⁷ Surely such a practice must allow us to infer something about his psychology? Likewise, surely we can deduce something from the fact that Jesus seems to have believed that his followers should value him and his mission above their families and even their own lives?⁴⁸ Cannot we legitimately assume something from the intensely eschatological character of his preaching? Of course, the terminology we use to describe Jesus’ personality is not self-evident, and we will need to pay close attention to cross-cultural taxonomies of personality developed elsewhere to produce anything useful from such a line of

enquiry,⁴⁹ but I believe it is evident, from the myriad of data that we have just touched upon, that we can say *something*.

So, after a rather extended and pessimistic description of the state of scholarship on the question of the psychology of the historical Jesus, I have tried to finish on a positive, if rather undeveloped note. Others I am sure can think of more productive areas to examine. For example, despite the problems with Miller and Capps, it seems legitimate to try saying something developmental about Jesus' psychology — after all, the early Christians believed that “he learned obedience through what he suffered”.⁵⁰ If more New Testament scholars could be encouraged to recognise that they are already, to some extent, engaged in psychological analysis of the historical Jesus, and that they are already, as a matter of course, examining data of real potential psychological significance, much could be gained. The present state of affairs has gone on too long.

Notes

1. John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 115–43.
2. Albert Schweitzer, *Die psychiatrische Beurteilung Jesu: Darstellung und Kritik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913).
3. For example, David G. Horrell, *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999).
4. John P. Meier, “The Present State of the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain,” *Biblica* 80 (1999): 459–87; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 2; Ben Witherington, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).
5. Horrell, *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*.
6. Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, trans. John P. Galvin (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 1.
7. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 479.
8. Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958).
9. Largely because it was too closely associated with Freudian psychoanalysis and emerged just as historians began to turn away from the study of “great men” and towards the analysis of cultures and populations.
10. Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 114–18.
11. Jacques Szaluta, *Psychohistory: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1999).
12. Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, 1.
13. James Beck, “Review of John W. Miller, *Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait*,” *Denver Journal* 1 (1998), <https://denverseminary.edu/the-denver-journal-article/jesus-at-thirty-a-psychological-and-historical-portrait/>.
14. For example, as Bill Telford observes in his review of the contribution of John Miller, there are two major influences over the information about Jesus as we know it today: (1) the process of selection, emendation and arrangement of the formative traditions about Jesus by the early church and for the early church, and (2) the introduction of literary and theological motifs by those who set

- down the traditions in writing. See W. R. Telford, "Review of John Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*," *SBL Central* (1998), <https://www.sblcentral.org/home/bookDetails/78>.
15. See Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).
 16. What Peter Gay has said of historians in general is also true of New Testament scholars: "The professional historian has always been a psychologist — an amateur psychologist." Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 6.
 17. For example, E.P. Sanders argues that the historical Jesus could not have sought his own death in order to effect some kind of redemption for others because that "would make him strange in any century" (despite influential models within Judaism current in his day, such as that in 2 Maccabees 7.37–38). According to Sanders, everything else that we know about Jesus makes him a "reasonable first-century visionary". Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 333. Emphasis his.
 18. See James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 616.
 19. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 653.
 20. For a useful survey, see John W. Miller, *Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 103–19.
 21. Mark 3.19b–21.
 22. For example, Matt 12.24, Mark 3.22, Luke 11.14; John 8.48.
 23. John 8.22.
 24. Justin J. Meggitt, "The Madness of King Jesus: Why Was Jesus Put To Death, but His Followers Were Not?," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29.4 (2007): 379–413, <https://doi.org/10.142064X07078990>.
 25. Philo, *Flaccus* 2.520–523.
 26. Josephus, *Bellum judaicum* 6.301–309.
 27. Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, 2.
 28. Miller, *Jesus at Thirty*, 2.
 29. Daniel Jacob Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1978).
 30. Luke 3.23.

31. Donald Capps, *Jesus: A Psychological Biography* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000); Capps, "A Psychobiography of Jesus," in *Psychology and the Bible*, ed. J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins (Westport, CT: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 59–70.
32. See Walter Scheidel, ed., *Debating Roman Demography*, Mnemosyne Supplements 211 (Leiden: Brill, 2001).
33. Though see David R. Hall, *The Gospel Framework: Fiction or Fact?* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998).
34. John 2.13–22.
35. Matt 21.12–13, Mark 11.15–19, Luke 19:45–48.
36. Henry Joel Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1937), 141.
37. Ben F. Meyer, "Jesus' Ministry and Self-Understanding," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce David Chilton and Craig Alan Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 351.
38. Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. J. Fraser McLuskey and Irene McLuskey (London: Hodder, Stoughton, 1960), 24.
39. 2 Cor 10.1.
40. For example, Mark 3.5, 8.33, 10.14, 10.21.
41. Bart D. Ehrman, "Did Jesus Get Angry or Agonize? A Text Critic Pursues the Jesus Story," *Bible Review* 21 (2005): 17–26, 49.
42. Klaus Berger, *Identity and Experience in the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 130.
43. For example, Matt 12.24, Mark 3.22, Luke 11.15.
44. See Luke 11.20 par. Matt 12.28; Luke 7.18–23 par. Matt 11.2–6.
45. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume Two: Mentor, Message and Miracles*, 5 vols. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 630.
46. For example, Isa 53.4 quoted in Matt 8.17.
47. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 261. See Matt 11.19; Luke 7.34.
48. For example, Luke 9.59–60; Mark 3.31–35, 8.34–37.
49. For example, John W. Berry et al., *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99–163; Robert R. McCrae and Paul T. Costa, "Personality Trait Structure as a Human Universal," *American Psychologist* 52.5 (1997):

509–16, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.5.509>.

50. Heb 5.8.

CHAPTER 4.

WAS THE HISTORICAL JESUS AN ANARCHIST? ANACHRONISM, ANARCHISM AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

It is true that if we could follow the precepts of the Nazarene this would be a different world to live in. There would then be no murder and no war; no cheating and lying and profit-making. There would be neither slave nor master, and we should all live like brothers, in peace and harmony. There would be neither poor nor rich, neither crime nor prison, but that would not be what the church wants. It would be what the Anarchists want. (Alexander Berkman)¹

The claim that Jesus was an anarchist is one that has been made by a variety of individuals and movements since the term “anarchist” itself first began to be commonly used from the 1840s onwards.² Friedrich Nietzsche³ is probably amongst the most culturally significant to have given Jesus this label, although other prominent figures have made more or less the same claim, including Nikolai Berdyaev,⁴ Leo Tolstoy,⁵ and Oscar Wilde,⁶ as have a host of lesser-known figures. It has been most common amongst groups and networks that are overt in their espousal of some form of Christian anarchism, such as the Catholic Worker Movement,⁷ the Jesus Radicals,⁸ the Brotherhood Church,⁹ and the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ,¹⁰ but could also be said to be implied in movements that have been identified as containing implicit anarchist characteristics, such as those

associated with some forms of liberation theology¹¹ and related contextual theologies.¹² The anarchist potentiality of the historical Jesus was even recognised by classical anarchist thinkers, most prominently Proudhon,¹³ but also, to varying degrees, Mikhail Bakunin,¹⁴ Peter Kropotkin,¹⁵ and Max Stirner.¹⁶

Of course, what exactly is meant when someone calls Jesus an “anarchist” is not self-evident and there is sometimes little, if anything, that such claims have in common. Authors assume a range of different interpretations of the figure of Jesus and also of anarchism itself in making their judgements. This paper is not a criticism of any such estimations of Jesus but rather an attempt to bring a little more clarity to the subject and to see if, historically speaking, there is any analytical value in talking in such a way about Jesus. More specifically, I would like to examine whether the historical Jesus can legitimately be called an anarchist.

By using the expression “the historical Jesus”, I am assuming a distinction, common in biblical scholarship since the nineteenth century,¹⁷ between the historical figure of Jesus and the Christ of Christian faith, a distinction that assumes that the two are not necessarily the same (a distinction that not all the writers that might be labelled “Christian anarchist” would share). My concern is not whether the Christ of Christian faith, that believers claim is known from the Christian Bible, doctrine, and experience, was, or indeed, for many of them, is an anarchist, but whether the man called Jesus of Nazareth, who lived and died about two thousand years ago, could usefully be called such.

I should also make it clear that I am specifically interested in whether Jesus can be called an “anarchist”. This is not necessarily the same as saying that he simply had anti-authoritarian tendencies nor that he was a violent insurrectionist of some kind — something that received considerable attention some decades

ago and which has recently been revived.¹⁸ Nor is it the same as deciding that he was a “revolutionary” of some other kind, something that has been a particular interest in contemporary scholarship, especially amongst those concerned with trying to demonstrate that the historical Jesus was an “inclusive” figure of some sort.¹⁹ Ideas about what might constitute “politics” have become increasingly nuanced, under the influence of such things as postcolonial and gender theory,²⁰ and the ideological contexts of both the historical Jesus and New Testament scholars themselves have come under extensive scrutiny, making assessments of this kind especially challenging.²¹

However, before we can attempt to answer the question we have posed, there are a number of preliminary matters that need to be addressed. In asking whether the historical Jesus can be usefully labelled an anarchist I am conscious that many anarchists may be familiar with material, academic and otherwise, which maintains that Jesus of Nazareth never existed,²² and they may think that my question is a pointless one to try to answer. Although no questions should be ignored in the critical study of religion, the arguments of those who doubt the existence of the historical Jesus are unpersuasive.²³ None of the opponents of early Christianity, although they found numerous grounds for criticising the life and teaching of Jesus, doubted his existence,²⁴ and, to put the matter concisely, the existence of Jesus of Nazareth is by far the most plausible way of explaining the traditions we have about a first-century, charismatic, Jewish peasant of that name. Traditions that, culturally speaking, cohere with what we know about the religious and cultural environment of Palestine at the time and which combine to form a picture of a specific and distinctive individual within it — not a banal and fanciful composite. Of course, these sources need to be handled with critical caution, as they have been since the Enlightenment, if not before, as most are composed by followers of Jesus.²⁵

However, this in itself is not surprising: the poor in the Roman empire — and pictures of Jesus from antiquity are universal in placing him in this category²⁶ — like the poor in most of history, had little and left less behind. Very few, mostly through accident rather than design, left anything, so thoroughgoing has been what E. P. Thompson called “the enormous condescension of posterity”.²⁷ Jesus’ significance, to those other than his immediate followers, was only evident in retrospect, and so we should not be surprised that there is little in the way of non-Christian documentary or literary evidence for his life and that our analysis will have to rely on extensive and diverse but largely Christian sources.²⁸

However, having accepted that it is possible to talk about a historical Jesus, how should we go about determining whether it is reasonable to label him an anarchist or not? The current literature that has touched on this is of little assistance. Many of those claiming that Jesus was an anarchist are often doing little more than constructing a mythology to give authority to a movement, as Woodcock has suggested.²⁹ Some have arrived at their interpretation of Jesus through more critical, ostensibly historical approach to the sources; Tolstoy’s anti-supernaturalist reading of the gospels, which had no place for the miraculous “rotten apples”³⁰ is perhaps the most famous example. However, there has been little systematic or coherent engagement with critical scholarship concerned with the study of the historical Jesus and the problems it has tried to address, and most readings by those who want to label Jesus an anarchist are characterised by rather literalistic and hermeneutically naive approaches to biblical texts,³¹ as the analysis of Alexandre Christoyannopoulos has recently demonstrated.³² The teachings of the historical Jesus are, for example, often assumed to be easily accessible. For some, this is just a matter of rescuing Jesus from Paul (and often, by implication, the later church), but however rhetorically

appealing it is to many Christian anarchists for whom Paul can be a rather uncomfortable figure,³³ this is not a defensible approach as Paul is the author of the earliest Christian literature that we possess and provides us with data about the historical Jesus which, limited though it is, actually predates the gospels.³⁴ A number solve the conundrum by giving priority to the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5.3–7.27), seeing it as the authoritative epitome of Jesus' teaching,³⁵ but in so doing they ignore its redactional character; it is, to a large extent, the construction of the author of the gospel in which it is found and cannot be said to go back to the historical Jesus.³⁶ Even if the sermon is composed of elements that early Christians thought originated with Jesus, many of which are paralleled in the so-called Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6.20–49), and can also be seen in the Epistle of James and the early Christian text, the *Didache*,³⁷ there is much about its structure and content that clearly owes itself to the final author of the Gospel of Matthew and those who brought together and transmitted the sources from which he created his final text. Of course, there have been a handful of scholars who have been practitioners of critical biblical scholarship and who have also shown an interest in Christian anarchism, most notably Leif Vaage³⁸ and Ched Myers,³⁹ but these are relatively few and, to date, there has been no critical and programmatic attempt to answer the question we have asked. In the light of this it is necessary to sketch, in a little detail, a valid method for scrutinising the sources we have for the historical Jesus that might provide us with some plausible results.

But before I do this, I should add some caveats about my own historical approach here. I am very conscious that in asking questions about the historical Jesus I might well be doing something that strikes some as epistemologically naive — even if a lot of people do it — and I could be accused, along with others who engage one way or another with the “Quest”⁴⁰ for the

historical Jesus, of making oddly positivist assumptions about the nature of historical knowledge and how it can be arrived at.⁴¹ However, my aims are quite modest: I am not claiming to uncover the “real” Jesus,⁴² nor even a useful one, but to make some provisional and, I hope, plausible suggestions about how this figure could be understood if examined in the light of the assumptions, aspirations, and praxis characteristic of anarchism. In asking this question I am not assuming anything about the significance of what follows or its implications: my interest in the historical Jesus is not in uncovering a figure, or an aspect of a figure, that is somehow determinative for Christians or anyone else. The shifting sands of historical reconstruction are not really a very useful foundation for anything much that matters — though many biblical scholars enjoy their time in the sandpit and make quite remarkable claims about the ephemeral edifices that they fashion.⁴³

Before I turn to the question of historical method it is also important to address an initial objection to the question this paper tries to answer, which might, in the eyes of some, like the question of Jesus’ existence, prevent them from proceeding any further: the problem of Jesus’ theism. I am conscious that it might be argued that the theism of the historical Jesus precludes him from being considered an anarchist. Most of the words or actions ascribed to him, in one way or another, either reference or are predicated upon belief in God.⁴⁴ For example, the arrival of God’s rule and its implication for humans seems to have preoccupied him and is at the heart of whatever socio-political vision he may have had, as we shall see.⁴⁵ However, it is not the case that anarchism necessarily implies atheism. It is true that atheism is central to many forms of classical anarchism; one need only think of Bakunin’s famous *God and the State*, Sébastien Faure’s *Les douze preuves de l’inexistence de dieu*,⁴⁶ or the infamous anti-clerical massacres carried out by anarchist units in the

Spanish Civil War.⁴⁷ Such atheism is often predicated upon the need to reject the tyranny assumed to be inherent in the idea of an omnipotent God (powerfully expressed in Bakunin's famous remark: "If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him").⁴⁸ It is also driven by the desire to oppose the oppression that is thought to result from the social consequences of belief in God, both that oppression caused by religious institutions themselves and the power that they exert, and also the oppression which results from the support such religious institutions, in turn, provide to the state, the prime focus of the anarchist critique of exploitation (Bakunin famously called the state: "the Church's younger brother").⁴⁹ Indeed, the apparent demise of religion — even if anarchism has often been rather premature in its claims about this — has been taken by some anarchists as evidence of the likely demise of the state, as can be seen in the words of Nicholas Walters:

The history of religion is a model for the history of government. Once it was thought impossible to have a society without God; now God is dead. It is still thought impossible to have a society without the state; now we must destroy the state.⁵⁰

The atheism of anarchism can be so intense as to spill over into misotheism, not just a denial of the existence of God but an active hatred of God.⁵¹ Nonetheless, as the influential chronicler of anarchism, Peter Marshall has noted, "Anarchism is not necessarily atheistic any more than socialism is."⁵² And it is clear from the existence of religious anarchists of various kinds, some of which we have already mentioned, that this is the case.⁵³ However eccentric they might appear, religious anarchists are not normally considered outside the anarchist fold in studies of the field (unlike, for example, anarcho-capitalists⁵⁴ or far-right national anarchists⁵⁵). It would be, for example, an unusual history of anarchism that did not make at least some mention of Tolstoy or the Catholic Worker Movement.⁵⁶ Therefore, the

theism of Jesus should not preclude him from being labelled an anarchist.

These observations aside, let us now turn to the question of historical method.

CONSTRUCTING THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Until recently there was a general agreement on the historical method used by most of those studying the figure of Jesus.⁵⁷ There was a rough consensus on the range of historical-critical tools that should be employed and the sources that were deemed relevant.⁵⁸ In addition, most scholars also agreed on the need to apply so-called “criteria of authenticity” to the data in order to distinguish between “authentic” and “inauthentic” traditions about Jesus.⁵⁹ Five criteria were given particular weight in reconstructions: embarrassment, dissimilarity, multiple attestation, coherence and crucifiability and these, explicitly or implicitly, have underpinned most of the critical studies of Jesus that have appeared in the last few decades.⁶⁰ However, the field is now experiencing something of a crisis. Consensus on historical method has not produced agreement on the results,⁶¹ and we have, instead, seen a proliferation of widely divergent reconstructions of the historical Jesus.⁶² There is a growing recognition that, despite attempts to rectify their weaknesses,⁶³ some of which have long been noted,⁶⁴ the criteria of authenticity are inadequate for the task, and should be abandoned. The discipline is now (or perhaps, once again) much more alert to the challenges posed by such things as memory⁶⁵ and has a greater awareness of the problems inherent in talking about “authenticity”. A recent essay by Dale Allison, a leading historical-Jesus scholar, in which he chronicled his own growing disillusionment with the way in which the subject has been approached is emblematic of the current state of the field.⁶⁶

My own position is similar to that at which Allison has

recently arrived.⁶⁷ There is much about Jesus that remains impossible to substantiate if we treat the data with the same kind of scepticism that one would use if you were, for example, trying to establish the details of the life of other figures who were significant in antiquity, such as Socrates,⁶⁸ Apollonius of Tyana,⁶⁹ or Rabbi Akiva,⁷⁰ and attempting to determine with any certainty what they may have said or done or what ideas they might have had. Only a limited amount of information can be ascertained about the historical Jesus with anything approaching confidence, and this, for the most part, is of a general rather than specific kind. The significant creativity evident amongst those who first repeated and recorded traditions about Jesus, and the lack of evidence that the early Christians were discerning in their transmission of stories about him,⁷¹ makes such a position unavoidable. Most of the data we have about Jesus can only provide us with *impressions* of the man, but these impressions are relatively trustworthy and reflect the enduring effect he had upon his earliest followers. They remain valid irrespective of the historicity of any particular unit of tradition, regardless of the abbreviation, elaboration, conflation, embellishment and fabrication evident within the sources.⁷² So, for example, as I have noted elsewhere, when we look at the relevant texts:

The virtues that Jesus exhibited in the face of death, of both forbearance and submission, and his refusal to return violence with violence, seem to have been recurring motifs in the pictures of Jesus that emerge from these traditions and tell us something about the enduring impression his personality made on his followers.⁷³

And there are, I believe, many larger patterns evident in the sources, patterns that are sufficiently robust so as to still hold true even if the data that they are derived from includes material that was invented. Indeed, as Allison has said, “fiction can bring us facts ... some of the traditions about Jesus which are, in the strict sense, not historical, surely give us a faithful impression of

the sort of person he was or the sort of thing he typically did.”⁷⁴ The temptation narratives, for example, despite being highly legendary depict Jesus as someone who shows disdain for personal political power, a motif that recurs a number of times in our sources.⁷⁵ And so I would go along with Allison, albeit for slightly different reasons, and say:

So, in the matter of Jesus, we should start not with the parts but with the whole, which means with the general impression that the tradition about him, *in toto*, tends to convey. The criteria of authenticity are, for this endeavour, simply in the way.⁷⁶

It is the working assumption of this text that beyond a small cluster of incidents — such as his crucifixion — the details of the life of Jesus are historically elusive although the general picture, and recurrent motifs, are discernible and historically reliable.

It follows, therefore, that I am not going to engage in detailed exegesis of specific texts, even those that look particularly relevant to our theme. For example, the “Render unto Caesar” incident,⁷⁷ something central to most studies of the politics of Jesus,⁷⁸ will not be the focus of detailed scrutiny because the best that can be said about individual traditions of this kind is that they were the sort of thing Jesus’ followers⁷⁹ thought Jesus might have said. Our business is about seeing the patterns and determining what was characteristic of the figure, not to be too concerned with the historicity of the details. Such an approach also has the advantage of resembling the way that ancient biographies — which to a large extent the gospels are⁸⁰ — would have been understood in antiquity.⁸¹

THE MEANING AND UTILITY OF THE TERM “ANARCHIST”

If we want to determine whether the historical Jesus can be termed an “anarchist” we need to determine not only how we can

arrive at knowledge about the figure that might allow us to make such a judgement but also what we mean by the term “anarchist” when we attempt such an evaluation. In addition, we will need to address two potential criticisms of the business of determining whether the term “anarchist” is a fair one to apply to Jesus: that the term “anarchist” is anachronistic and that it is ethnocentric.

Any attempt to define anarchism has to deal with the problem of its popular image. The notion that anarchism is about the absence of order rather than the absence of government, that it is synonymous with chaos and senseless violence, has persisted since the Victorian period,⁸² and was made famous by such works as Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*.⁸³ Of course, there are some forms of insurrectionary anarchism that appear to fit this stereotype — one needs only think of the recent activities of the *Federazione Anarchica Informale*⁸⁴ — but counter to the popular image, the use of violence is,⁸⁵ for most anarchists, subject to considerable constraints, and most would eschew anything that could be deemed to be coercive violence against persons, even if outright pacifism is a minority position.⁸⁶ Far from being senseless and destructive, most anarchists would consider themselves engaged in a constructive project consisting of “reconstructive visions, prefigurative politics and self-organisation”.⁸⁷

But once we move past the problem of the popular image of anarchism, and try to define anarchism more accurately, we still face a number of acute challenges. There are, for example, a range of terms commonly used to qualify the word “anarchist”, such as collectivist, communist, individualist, liberal, lifestyle, mutualist, poststructuralist, primitivist, social, and syndicalist, the diversity of which seems, at first sight, to indicate something that is so pluriform that it resists definition. But whilst such labels, and more, are clearly significant, it is possible to have what has been called “an anarchism without adjectives”,⁸⁸ some

kind of anarchism that is roughly representative of what most forms of anarchism have in common and true to its varied but essentially ecumenical character.⁸⁹ Although it is customary to begin such fundamental definitions with an etymological point about the Greek word *anarchos*, from which the term anarchism is derived,⁹⁰ and to point out that it means “without a ruler”, this does not get us very far, and saying something more is challenging, not least because anarchism is profoundly anti-dogmatic.⁹¹ Nonetheless, the definition of the anthropologist Brian Morris is one that is helpful for our purposes, encapsulating both its critical and constructive programme:

Anarchists are people who reject all forms of government or coercive authority, all forms of hierarchy and domination [...] But anarchists also seek to establish or bring about by varying means, a condition of anarchy, that is, a decentralised society without coercive institutions.⁹²

However, it might also be helpful to keep in mind, in what follows, the suggestion by David Graeber, that any definition of the term anarchist has to encompass a range of interrelated and overlapping meanings. He notes that generally speaking, people, ideas or institutions are labelled anarchist if they endorse an explicit doctrine, display a particular attitude, or engage in specific practices. That is, anarchists include those who are heirs of the intellectual tradition that began in the nineteenth century which is characterised by “a certain vision of human possibilities”;⁹³ those that display a particular “attitude” which “reject[s] government and believe[s] that people would be better off in a world without hierarchies”;⁹⁴ and those that engage in practices and forms of social organisation that are broadly egalitarian in ethos⁹⁵ (seen, for example in what E. E. Evans-Pritchard called the “ordered anarchy” of the Nuer).⁹⁶ No definition of “anarchist” will ever be satisfactory, but Graeber’s remarks remind us that whilst we should be careful not to make

our understanding of the term so broad as to be meaningless (it will not do, for example, to label anyone who is anti-authoritarian an anarchist) we should be aware that the term is an expansive, dynamic and necessarily malleable one.

However, having briefly explored the question of what an “anarchist” might be usefully said to be, we now need to address whether it is anachronistic or ethnocentric to ask if the historical Jesus can be usefully described in this way.

The charge of anachronism seems, at face value, a damning one. To many anarchism may seem clearly wedded to a specific historical moment, its character determined by its formal origins in the nineteenth century, or the brief periods of prominence it enjoyed with the Makhnovists in Ukraine,⁹⁷ the CNT-FAI in Republican Spain,⁹⁸ the events in France in May 1968,⁹⁹ or its more recent re-emergence within anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movements, and anarchist volunteers contributing to the defense of the Rojava revolution in north Syria/West Kurdistan.¹⁰⁰ All these are a long way from first-century Palestine and so it seems legitimate to ask whether it is just downright anachronistic to even pose the question whether the historical Jesus was an anarchist. If it is then we are wasting our time.

However, the problem of using contemporary terminology to describe and elucidate past realities is not a new one and obviously not limited to the study of the historical Jesus (although scholars of the historical Jesus often behave as though they were engaged in a unique endeavour). Given the opprobrium that has faced those who have maintained that the historical Jesus can be usefully described as a Jewish Cynic,¹⁰¹ a not unreasonable suggestion given the clear resemblances between Jesus and the philosophical movement of that name active in the early Roman empire, and a suggestion that at least had the virtue of applying to the historical Jesus a term that was

current in the first-century world,¹⁰² to ask whether Jesus could usefully be called an “anarchist” seems unwise. However, it is a term that is, generally speaking, particularly amenable to being used of a figure in the past. As Graeber has noted, the founding ideologues of anarchism, such as Proudhon, “did not think of themselves as having invented anything particularly new. The basic principles of anarchism — self-organization, voluntary association, mutual aid — referred to forms of human behaviour they assumed had been around about as long as humanity.”¹⁰³ It is certainly a less problematic term to use than, say, “Marxist”. The latter has always been associated with high theory and the fundamental project of analysis begun with Karl Marx, whilst anarchism is, again in the words of Graeber, “more a moral project”¹⁰⁴ and the only thing that really changed in the nineteenth century was that it acquired a name.¹⁰⁵ Such thinking lies behind, for example, Robert Graham’s recent documentary chronicle of anarchism, which begins at 300CE,¹⁰⁶ or Peter Marshall’s *Demanding the Impossible*, a substantial and influential history of anarchism that traces the origins of anarchism back to Taoism and the sixth century BCE, and, like Graham, contains extensive discussion of pre-nineteenth-century movements. Indeed, not just historians of anarchism but historians working in other fields have believed that anarchism can have analytic purchase when talking about the past. Patrica Crone, for example, a key figure in the study of Islamic origins, has argued that some Mu’tazilites and members of the Najadāt sub-sect of Khārijites, should be termed anarchists and included in histories of anarchism as they believed that society could, indeed *should*, function without a government or what we would call a state.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Norman Cohn used it to describe various millenarian movements in medieval Europe, most notably the Taborites of Bohemia.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, the anthropologist James C. Scott has used the term in his history of the peoples of Zomia, a region

of upland Southeast Asia which has, until relatively recently, resisted the “internal colonialism” of state-making in the area and whose inhabitants had successfully practised the art of not being governed for centuries.¹⁰⁹ And similarly, fellow anthropologist Brian Morris has considered it an appropriate designation for Lao Tzu.¹¹⁰ Therefore, we should not be reluctant to use the term “anarchist” to describe the figure of Jesus, if he merits such a designation.

Nonetheless, the problem of anachronism is not necessarily dealt with so easily. For much of its history anarchism has been associated with opposition to both capitalism and the state, which are usually seen as inseparable objects that mutually reinforce one another, are irredeemably coercive,¹¹¹ and neither of which might strike someone as obviously present in the first-century, pre-industrial world, something that might undermine the utility of the concept for our purposes. However, anarchists have not always seen capitalism and the state as the sole causes of inequalities of power and creations of hierarchy,¹¹² and critiques of all forms of domination, whatever their source and in whatever domain, are common, something particularly evident in the articulations of anarchism that have come to the fore in recent years. It is also the case that the terms “capitalism” and “state” can have some explanatory power for making sense of antiquity and the world within which the historical Jesus lived. First, it has proven useful for those engaged in the study of antiquity to characterise the economy of the early Roman empire as one of political capitalism,¹¹³ in the Weberian sense, an economy that consisted of “the exploitation of the opportunities for profit arising from the exercise of political power”;¹¹⁴ it may have been a market economy of sorts¹¹⁵ but profit-making was in the hands of the political elite within the empire and its retainers. Secondly, whilst there was little analogous to the modern state in antiquity, the Roman government did have

ultimate military, fiscal, legislative and judicial power within the regions it ruled (even if also allowed considerable autonomy). Although the Roman empire of the first century CE was relatively light on administrative functionaries¹¹⁶ and military personnel,¹¹⁷ given the extent of territory controlled,¹¹⁸ it certainly meets a minimal definition of a state where a state is understood as a social organisation “capable of exerting a considerable degree of power [...] over large numbers of people, and for sustained periods”.¹¹⁹ Indeed, the Rome empire fulfilled the classic definition of the state as that which “lays claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a territory”.¹²⁰

We also need to address the related problem of ethnocentrism. If we call Jesus an “anarchist” are we employing a term that has no interpretative value outside of the modern European or North American context within which anarchism first emerged as a self-conscious movement, employing a concept that impedes rather than assists our understanding of a figure from a different cultural and historical context?¹²¹ One that might be said to carry with it the presumption of superiority characteristic of Western modernity (or, indeed, post-modernity) within which anarchism was born and thrives? Not only would such a judgement be wrong because anarchism itself has a long history of formal existence outside of Europe or North America (one thinks, for example, of the history of anarchist movements in Africa,¹²² China,¹²³ Korea, Japan¹²⁴ and elsewhere),¹²⁵ but also because, as we have noted, it has been used by those engaged in the description and interpretation of non-European cultures, famously by Evans-Pritchard but also by other anthropologists acutely aware of such criticisms.¹²⁶ Harold Barclay has made perhaps the most thoroughgoing defence of the use of the term cross-culturally. He recognises that the use of the term “anarchy” might be viewed as:

Ethnocentric and confuses ideology with social classification. It is

to take a highly emotionally charged word, one with a very clear ideological connotation, identified with Euro-American cultural traditions, and to apply it cross-culturally, when those in other cultures would clearly lack to the ideology and values of the anarchist. Thus, not only is the word distorted but also is the meaning of those cultures.

But quite rightly he notes that:

If this is true of the word “anarchy”, it applies equally to the use of such words as “democratic”, “government”, “law” [...] and a host of others employed daily by social scientists, yet derived from ordinary speech. Social sciences is full of terms in common usage which are applied to social contexts in other cultures. There are certainly dangers to such a procedure. It is easy to carry extraneous ideological baggage along with the term. On the other hand, if we cannot at all make such cross-cultural transfers, we are left with a proliferation of neologisms which become pure jargonese, enhancing obfuscation rather than clarification.¹²⁷

So the question of whether the historical Jesus was an anarchist is one that can be asked and one to which we can expect a meaningful answer of some kind. Let us now sketch a response.

WAS THE HISTORICAL JESUS AN ANARCHIST?

As we discussed earlier, any attempt to talk about the *historical* Jesus will need to concern itself with impressions and motifs rather than detailed exegesis of specific traditions. Even within these constraints there is much that could be said but for the purposes of this essay I would like to focus on a prominent motif present within a large quantity of traditions associated with the figure of Jesus: the kingdom of God. A “kingdom”, of whatever kind, does not, of course, sound a very anarchist thing. However, it should be noted, from the outset, that although the Greek term *basileia*, which is translated into English as “kingdom”, can be understood as having a territorial or geographical meaning, it

can also refer to royal power or sovereignty; it can be understood as “reign” or “rule” as well as “realm”. This is also true of the Hebrew and Aramaic word *malkūth* which probably underlies the use of the Greek term.¹²⁸ So, although we shall use the expression “kingdom of God”, as this phrase remains the best-known rendering into English of the Greek phrase *basileia tou theou* found in early Christian sources and associated with the figure of Jesus, it can also be thought of as the “reign of God” or “rule of God”.

In our sources, references to the kingdom of God saturate not just Jesus’ teaching but his activity too.¹²⁹ The phrase, or the term “kingdom” by itself, is prominent in the canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke (customarily referred to as the Synoptic Gospels) and the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas,¹³⁰ a text which is considered by most scholars in the field to contain early traditions about Jesus comparable to those of the Synoptics¹³¹ (the Gospel of John is usually judged to be somewhat later and of little value in the study of the historical Jesus).¹³² The “kingdom” is all pervasive. It appears at the outset of accounts of the life of Jesus, as the subject of his preaching, and remains a preoccupation throughout his ministry. For example, at the beginning of his public activity, according to Mark and Matthew, Jesus proclaims:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news. (Mark 1.15, Matt 4.17)¹³³

And, it remains a preoccupation to the end, a subject of discussion at his final meal¹³⁴ and even his words from the cross.¹³⁵ It was determinative of the content and character of his ethics. For example, renunciation of wealth appears a prerequisite for entrance to the kingdom.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for

someone who is rich enter the kingdom of God. (Mark 10.25, Matt 19.24, Luke 18.25)

The kingdom is also directly linked to Jesus' role as a healer and exorcist, something that is a particularly prominent characteristic of his portrayal in our sources (and although unusual, not exceptional, in the cultural context of the early empire and first-century Judaism).¹³⁶ He is presented, for example, as declaring that his exorcisms are proof of the kingdom's arrival:

But if it is by the Spirit [finger] of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. (Matt 12.28, Luke 11.20)

The theme of the kingdom is also present in a range of forms of tradition from which our sources about Jesus are composed, including aphorisms, apocalyptic sayings, pronouncement stories, miracle stories, legends or parables.¹³⁷ Indeed, parables, "the characteristic form of Jesus' teaching",¹³⁸ seem particularly associated with this idea. Not only are we told that the interpretation of the parables requires hearers to know "the secret of the kingdom of God"¹³⁹ but a number of parables are introduced with direct reference to the kingdom and most function to explicate some aspect of its character.¹⁴⁰ The Gospel of Thomas, for example, regularly presents the parables it contains as concerned with the nature of the kingdom. In a tradition that does not have a direct parallel with anything in the Synoptic tradition, the reader is told:

Jesus said: The kingdom of the [Father] is like a woman, carrying a jar full of meal and walking a long way. The handle of the jar broke; the meal poured out behind her on the road. She was unaware, she knew not her loss. When she came into her house, she put down the jar (and) found it empty. (*Gos. Thom.* 97)

Whilst the introductions to the parables, which tie them so

clearly to the theme of the kingdom, might well be redactional and not go back beyond the final composition of the gospels themselves, they are so commonplace that it seems fair to conclude that the parables — or at least most of them — were central to whatever Jesus wished to convey about the kingdom of God.

So we seem on safe grounds in saying that the kingdom or reign of God reflects the main concern of the historical Jesus, as most historical Jesus scholars agree, even if they disagree quite sharply about what exactly this might imply.¹⁴¹ As Markus Bockmuehl puts it, “The favourite and important subject of Jesus’ teaching is clearly the Kingdom of God.”¹⁴²

What exactly the historical Jesus may have had in mind when he spoke of the kingdom is notoriously difficult to determine definitively not just because close antecedents to this idea are not easy to identify, even if it clearly draws upon concepts common in the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish literature,¹⁴³ but also because the form of teaching used by Jesus to talk about the kingdom of God, the parable,¹⁴⁴ is both terse and figurative — most parables appear to be extended metaphors or similes¹⁴⁵ — and, as a result their meaning is, to an extent, open and polyvalent (though clearly not arbitrary).¹⁴⁶ They cannot be crudely reduced to a single referent or point;¹⁴⁷ the symbol of the kingdom in the parables of Jesus is allusive, tensive and experiential.¹⁴⁸ But the meaning of the kingdom in the teaching of Jesus has also been hampered by the preoccupations of scholarship. Discussion of the theme of the kingdom in the study of the historical Jesus is often effectively constrained by questions of chronology that are rather narrowly conceived. Did he believe its arrival was imminent?¹⁴⁹ Or that it was already present?¹⁵⁰ Or both?¹⁵¹ Or are such temporal judgements predicated on culturally inappropriate assumptions about the nature of time and language?¹⁵² This is not the place to rehearse

such debates which have preoccupied scholars of the historical Jesus since the inception of the so-called “Quest”¹⁵³ — although I would say that both tendencies can be found throughout the data, and so it seems unreasonable to deny that one or other did not go back in some form to the figure of Jesus, as has recently been the fashion.¹⁵⁴ Rather I am here more interested in the question of the *character* of the reign of God envisioned by Jesus (although I am aware that this is deeply entwined with the question of eschatology).¹⁵⁵ That is, I would like to make some observations about what the historical Jesus is likely to have understood by the rule of God and the nature of human response to it, and in particular, a number of motifs that may legitimately and usefully be described as anarchist — although what follows is not a comprehensive analysis of the possibilities but an indicative treatment of the subject.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS CHARACTERISED BY THE ACTIVE IDENTIFICATION AND CRITIQUE OF COERCIVE RELATIONS OF POWER, AND THE ENACTMENT OF NEW, EGALITARIAN MODES OF SOCIAL LIFE

This is seen, perhaps most acutely, in the recurrent, general motif of reversal which is typical of traditions associated with Jesus. The theme of reversal is more than a rhetorical characteristic of his teaching. As the leading scholar of New Testament ethics, Richard Hays, has noted:

The theme of *reversal* seems to have been pervasive in his thought [...] This reversal motif is built into the deep structure of Jesus’ message, present in all layers of the tradition [...] a foundational element of Jesus’ teaching.¹⁵⁶

The socio-political nature of much of this reversal¹⁵⁷ is obvious to a modern reader without knowledge of the specific political,

religious, and cultural context of first-century Palestine, although such knowledge is necessary for a fuller exploration of its implications.¹⁵⁸ In Jesus' vision, the kingdom belonged to the poor, not the rich;¹⁵⁹ to the hungry, not those who were full;¹⁶⁰ to the tax-collectors and prostitutes, not chief priests and the aristocrats;¹⁶¹ to children, not adults;¹⁶² to sinners, not the righteous.¹⁶³ Its values were exemplified by foreigners,¹⁶⁴ beggars,¹⁶⁵ and impoverished widows, not the religiously, politically and economically powerful.¹⁶⁶ We find this theme in aphorisms,¹⁶⁷ commandments,¹⁶⁸ and sayings¹⁶⁹ ascribed to the historical Jesus, but, perhaps above all, in the parables. For example, in the Parable of the Wedding Feast,¹⁷⁰ the eventual guests at the banquet are those that one would least expect to be there — "the poor, the crippled, the blind and lame."¹⁷¹ In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, it is the beggar Lazarus who "longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table", and who goes to be with Abraham and the angels, whilst the rich man who has "dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day" is in Hades.¹⁷² In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, the manner in which someone has treated the "least" in society, those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, imprisoned, sick, or foreign, provides the criterion by which their life is ultimately judged.¹⁷³ In the Parable of the Rich Fool, the selfish accumulation of wealth during his life leaves the rich man impoverished when he dies.¹⁷⁴ But perhaps the most compelling evidence of socio-political reversal in traditions associated with Jesus is the recurrent portrayal of his own praxis, as someone who lived with the outcasts and the socially marginal,¹⁷⁵ and in an almost constant state of conflict with those who were not.¹⁷⁶ The theme of reversal functions not just to expose a number of inequitable relationships, but also to make visible and valorise the powerless within them, and their needs and their desires.

In addition to the theme of reversal, we can see a significant cluster of traditions in which exploitation, whether economic,¹⁷⁷ legal,¹⁷⁸ theocratic,¹⁷⁹ military,¹⁸⁰ or medical,¹⁸¹ is exposed and condemned, and responses advocated or made available that affirm both the agency of the oppressed and their capacity to resist such oppression. An example of this is seen, for example, in the tradition of how one should respond to being pressed into service by the occupying forces in Judea to carry their equipment.¹⁸² The command that the victim carry it further than was demanded, if acted upon, would have resulted in striking and unexpected behaviour that could function not just to restore the power of agency to the victim but also to non-violently undermine the assumption, on the part of the soldier, that he, and the colonial regime which he represented, had ultimate authority — a response that could be seen to enact the command to love enemies,¹⁸³ an idea particularly associated with Jesus in our sources.¹⁸⁴ The concern to restore agency to those deprived of it can also be seen, though in a rather different way, in the stories in which individuals gain healing from Jesus by actively demanding it from him or even seizing it for themselves — tactics which he seems not just to have tolerated but to have encouraged.¹⁸⁵

New models of social relationships are enacted that present alternative, largely egalitarian ways of living. For example, there are a number of traditions associated with the historical Jesus that contain sharp criticisms of familial relationships and obligations,¹⁸⁶ and whilst it would be wrong to see these as part of a programmatic attack on patriarchy (significant numbers of women were drawn to the movement, but there is no evidence of a “critical feminist impulse” in traditions about Jesus),¹⁸⁷ the traditional form of the family is eclipsed and a much more inclusive, fictive family, where membership is not conditional on ties of marriage and blood, but on shared purpose, is advocated and comes into being amongst Jesus’ followers.¹⁸⁸ Social

relations and obligations are no longer structured according to reciprocity, whether symmetrical or asymmetrical, which requires someone to have the means to “repay”¹⁸⁹ but instead an ethos of generosity is expected, where debts are forgiven and those with resources are told to be free with them and not to keep account.¹⁹⁰

Traditions of Jesus’ teaching and praxis also regularly involve a distinctive approach to dining, something that was central to the literal and symbolic maintenance of inequitable relationships of power in antiquity, and also, in the case of first-century Palestine, created significant divisions.¹⁹¹ He advocated and demonstrated what John Dominic Crossan calls “open commensality”,¹⁹² that is “eating together without using table as a miniature map of society’s vertical discriminations and lateral separations.”¹⁹³ This was a significant motif in Jesus’ practice,¹⁹⁴ so much so that he was mocked as “a glutton and a drunkard”¹⁹⁵ and someone who ate with “tax collectors and sinners”.¹⁹⁶ But it is also present in the teaching traditions ascribed to Jesus,¹⁹⁷ particularly the parable traditions,¹⁹⁸ as well as miracle traditions,¹⁹⁹ and is even in his apocalyptic vision of the future kingdom: “I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”.²⁰⁰ — a tradition that indicates that the aspirations and concerns of the kingdom envisaged by the historical Jesus were ultimately universal²⁰¹ and could even be said to come close to a form of cosmopolitanism,²⁰² a concept central to anarchism.²⁰³

The historical Jesus also appears to have modelled a form of social interaction that ignored expectations of deference,²⁰⁴ probably rooted in the expectation that the behaviour of those in the kingdom should reflect the character of God, and God was for Jesus, and other Jews of the time, “no respecter of persons”.²⁰⁵ This was something both egalitarian in itself but also revealed and challenged the structures and presumptions of power

symbolised by such deference; to those who were beneficiaries of stratification and hierarchy, it presented a disruptive rhetoric of impoliteness.²⁰⁶

However, whilst there are sufficient clusters of data to make it plausible to see the historical Jesus as a figure known for confronting coercive and hierarchical relationships, and advocating alternative models of social life, there are aspects of his teaching and actions that do not easily fit with this picture, are equally prominent in our sources, and need to be addressed.

First, it is quite clear that although the figure of Jesus is characteristically associated with the powerless, he enjoyed the support of those who facilitated and benefited from political and economic exploitation, supported by the largess of the rich and socialising with the agents of imperial rule, such as tax-collectors and the military. This is something sufficiently prominent in our sources that it cannot be dismissed as redactional, an invention of Christians who were comfortable within the empire and wished to legitimate their experience.²⁰⁷ Such a picture is difficult to reconcile with a figure engaged in a thoroughgoing and confrontational response to non-egalitarian forms of social life. Was he, perhaps, so inclusive that this somehow transcended, or less positively, undermined the political vision we have observed? This seems unlikely. As Bockmuehl quite rightly notes, Jesus was *not* an inclusive figure: "Jesus of Nazareth includes a remarkably wide diversity of the marginalized, yet he also marginalizes an uncomfortably diverse range of the religiously or socio-economically included."²⁰⁸ It is probably best to explain this apparent tension by reference to the theme of repentance, something regularly associated with the notion of the kingdom of God. Repentance was not concerned with contrition but rather the idea that individuals should return to God²⁰⁹ and do what God expects of those who wish to be righteous.²¹⁰ In our sources those responding to the call of Jesus, whoever they are,

are expected to imitate Jesus' praxis, including such things as open commensality, and there is also evidence, from the story of Zaccheus the tax collector, but also in the story of the unnamed rich ruler, that the rich were also expected to make restitution and return what they had extracted by exploitation.²¹¹

Second, it should be noted that the historical Jesus does not appear straightforwardly or consistently anti-authoritarian or anti-hierarchical. It would be unfair to ignore the considerable range of data where Jesus is presented as either claiming an authoritative or pivotal role,²¹² or where it is implied,²¹³ and this observation stands regardless of other questions about Jesus' self-estimation and "Christology" which have attracted so much attention because of their obvious theological consequences.²¹⁴ Of course, anarchists have not been averse to leaders, albeit often for tactical reasons, one thinks of the prominence of Nestor Makhno, Errico Malatesta, or Emma Goldman, but this claim appears to be of a rather different kind. The historical Jesus initiated a hierarchical organisation through the appointment of twelve disciples, something which he did not envisage as temporary,²¹⁵ and his own authority was predicated upon coercion through the pronouncement of future judgement upon those who rejected it.²¹⁶ It is usually assumed that where leadership exists within anarchism, it is "a continual exchange of mutual, temporary, and, above all, voluntary authority and subordination".²¹⁷ Evidently the type of leadership modelled and advocated by the historical Jesus was somewhat different.

In response to this it could be said that the nature of the leadership shown by Jesus and expected of the Twelve was, somewhat paradoxically, an inversion of hierarchical expectations, epitomized in the repeated motif that leaders must be servants, and the deliberate contrast of the model of power within the community with that which was characteristic of the

empire, indeed, on which the empire was built and sustained, to the detriment of the latter.²¹⁸ And so, in Mark, we read:

So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” (Mark 10.42–44)²¹⁹

It could also be said — though this is perhaps a little less evident — that in choosing twelve disciples the historical Jesus was using a symbol of a pre-monarchical Israel, when it existed as a confederation of tribes, to represent his vision of the kingdom, something that Ched Myers has said “bears some resemblance to ‘anarcho-syndicalist’ vision in modernity”;²²⁰ recalling a time before the people of Israel decided to be like other nations and have a king, rejecting God’s direct rule.²²¹

The activities of healing and teaching that are so characteristic of the representation of Jesus in our sources also have little to do with authoritarian forms of kingly, messianic leadership that were dominant at the time.²²² Indeed, given that the historical Jesus seems to have expected those around him to be empowered to carry out similar actions,²²³ it might not be too fanciful to agree with Gerd Theissen that the historical Jesus may well have envisaged his followers collectively taking on messianic tasks, enacting a kind of group messiahship. If this is the case, it would have meant that the historical Jesus effectively played down his own significance and so could be seen as advocating a kind of distributed, non-authoritarian form of leadership.²²⁴

Similarly, the traditions about his death are consistent in presenting a figure who remained consistent in not using or endorsing violence against enemies and for whom physical violence by humans against humans was anathema.²²⁵ It was not a form of leadership in which authority was equated with a

superior sense of personal value. Indeed, it appears to have been the opposite.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PREFIGURATIVE

As we have noted, the kingdom motif is not just associated with judgement but also with new forms of social life, and these are not just advocated but practised. It can therefore be usefully understood as prefigurative and, more specifically, prefigurative in a way that resembles anarchist ethics. In most forms of anarchist ethics, the means are consistent with the desired ends, that is “the outcomes are *prefigured* by the methods”.²²⁶ The practice of anarchists is assumed to have immediate consequences and to resemble the outcome that is desired. As James Guillaume, a colleague of Bakunin, said, in his famous critique of statist socialists, “How could one want an egalitarian and free society to issue from authoritarian organisation? It is impossible.”²²⁷

The ethics of Jesus could be seen as analogous to this and in many ways this helps makes sense of the notion that the kingdom is already present, and being enacted, even if in an initially insignificant way, in a manner that resembles and is related to its final form. One thinks, for example, of the Parable of the Mustard Seed²²⁸ or the practice of open commensality we have touched upon.

Indeed, I do not think it is pushing things too far to speak of the prefigurative ethics of the kingdom as necessitating a form of direct action, something characteristic of anarchism and something that involves “acting as if the state’s representatives have no more rights to impose their views of the rights or the wrongs of the situation than anybody else.”²²⁹ A number of the activities of Jesus seem to have this characteristic, whether it is the tradition of his action in the Temple,²³⁰ or his response to the question about the payment of taxes to Caesar,²³¹ or his

behaviour at his trial,²³² in all of which he appears to show no concern for the consequences of his actions. Indeed, just as direct action is sometimes “playful and carnivalesque”,²³³ so often are the forms of behaviour ascribed to Jesus or advocated by him.²³⁴ As Peter Marshall rightly observes, Jesus consistently “held political authority up to derision”,²³⁵ demystifying and mocking the power it claimed.

THE VISION OF THE KINGDOM IS NOT UTOPIAN BUT REFLEXIVE, UNDETERMINED, AND SELF-CREATIVE

It is surprisingly difficult to describe, with any detail, the forms of social life expected within the new reality enacted and proposed by the historical Jesus. Although, as we have noted, it can be characterised by certain practices, such as open commensality, there is much that is not spelt out. There certainly is no obvious utopian blueprint, and despite the arguments of Mary Ann Beavis, it is not useful to characterise the vision of the kingdom held by the historical Jesus as utopian.²³⁶ As we have noted, the main mode of teaching employed by Jesus, the parable, is figurative and by its nature allusive, resisting simple explanation and allowing a range of indeterminate, experiential responses. Parables do not communicate a specific plan. Indeed, it seems more helpful to think of Jesus as anti-utopian, a quality that resonates with anarchist thinking even if anarchists are popularly assumed to be driven by utopian visions. Although utopias can have their uses — they can inspire, encourage, and provide a pleasurable escape²³⁷ — they can also be coercive and that is why, on the whole, they have been resisted by anarchists. Utopianism forces others to live in a certain way, and a utopia envisaged as a single, totalising endpoint will necessitate manipulation to fit a predetermined plan. As Marie Louise Berneri demonstrated in her analysis of utopian thought from Plato to Huxley, they are inherently authoritarian.²³⁸ For

anarchists, the details of such social order need to be determined by those that are dominated. Their ethics are:

Reflexive and self-creative, as they do not assess practices against a universally prescribed end-point, as some utopian theorists have done, but through a process of immanent critique.²³⁹

Some might feel uneasy about this alleged similarity between the historical Jesus and anarchism because it is often assumed that the historical Jesus had a clear idea of his intentions and understanding of the implications of the kingdom of God from the outset. However, such thinking is an imposition upon the records of subsequent doctrinal assumptions. Our sources indicate a figure open to reflection and revision in the light of events and encounter with others. An example of this is the story of the Syrophenician woman in which a gentile argues a reluctant Jesus into healing her daughter.²⁴⁰ The incidents at Nazareth²⁴¹ and Caesarea Philippi,²⁴² likewise seem to be moments that were critical in the formation of his self-understanding.²⁴³ The possibility that the historical Jesus' own life was one characterised by reflexivity and a mutable understanding of his mission, should not come as a surprise even if it may be surprising to some. As Henry Cadbury observed many decades ago:

Probably much that is commonly said about the general purpose of Jesus' life and the specific place in that purpose of detailed incidents is modern superimposition upon a nearly patternless life and upon nearly patternless records of it.²⁴⁴

THE PEDAGOGY OF THE KINGDOM IS PREFIGURATIVE AND NON-COERCIVE

There are also significant parallels between the distinctive pedagogy associated with the kingdom and the non-coercive, prefigurative pedagogy of anarchism. Although the latter is, as

Judith Suissa has argued, surprisingly under-theorised,²⁴⁵ pedagogy has been something of considerable significance in anarchism. This is largely, as Justin Mueller has suggested, because unlike other political philosophies aimed at social transformation, “education has never been simply the means to achieve a new social order”,²⁴⁶ but rather part of the prefigurative practice that is central to all forms of anarchism, a prefigurative practice characterised by non-coercion, and the inculcation of solidarity and fellow feeling, rather than competition and domination, the encouragement of active empathy and identification with others.²⁴⁷ Some of Jesus’ teaching does seem to have taken the form of commands, such as the command to love enemies²⁴⁸ or the prohibition on divorce,²⁴⁹ but by far the largest quantity of his teaching comes in the form of parables, which are figurative and affective, a form that does not compel the hearer to arrive at a narrowly predetermined understanding of what is being conveyed. Many parables could also be said to function in some way to directly encourage empathy and identification with others,²⁵⁰ and most could be said to contribute to this indirectly by, amongst other things, intensifying the significance placed upon the praxis of the kingdom.

However, before we conclude our discussion it is important to note that some grounds on which Jesus is often considered an anarchist should not be part of any attempt to answer the question, despite their popularity. For example, some might be surprised that there has been no mention of Jesus’ death in the preceding analysis. As Christoyannopoulos has noted:

For most Christian Anarchists, Jesus is the saviour precisely because he accepted the cross — *that* is the revolution. He is the messiah because he consistently responds to injustice with unwavering love, forgiveness and non-resistance. He does not seek to lead yet another revolutionary government, but instead points to the true

kingdom beyond the state. Therefore, the crucifixion is indeed the glorious climax of Jesus' messianic ministry.²⁵¹

For many, there is something “inevitable” about this conclusion to the life of Jesus, it is “the concrete consequence” of his teaching and practice.²⁵² Christian anarchists and others who believe that Jesus deserves the label of anarchist, are not so unusual in seeing Jesus' death as a necessary consequence of his teaching. In modern historical-Jesus scholarship, as we have mentioned, one of the criteria used to determine which traditions are likely to go back to the historical Jesus is the criterion of “crucifiability”²⁵³ — that is, if a tradition can explain Jesus' execution then it is judged likely to be “authentic”. However, given the ubiquity of crucifixion in the empire, and the casual manner in which it could be imposed on the poor and inconsequential, it is likely that the Roman authorities did not give the killing of Jesus much thought, and he need not have done anything much, in their eyes, for them to put him to death. For example, as A. E. Harvey plausibly suggested:

Jesus could have been one of those innocent victims who are picked up by police action at a time when peace-keeping has become difficult and the forces of law and order are over-stretched, and then arbitrarily put to death.²⁵⁴

The *titulus*,²⁵⁵ placed on the cross by the Romans, which seems to indicate that Jesus was killed because of a kingly claim of some kind, might well be no more than evidence that, from the perspective of the Romans, they were executing a deluded madman who talked of invisible kingdoms — something that would be in keeping of what we know about their treatment of others they believed to fall into this category.²⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

To return to our question: was the historical Jesus an anarchist? Any answer depends upon the definition of “anarchist” used and how much room such a definition has for anarchism to be judged to exist outside of a formal political movement composed of self-declared anarchists. It would, however, be an inadequate definition that limited itself solely to the likes of Proudhon, and one that would not be true to their own understanding of the perennial nature of the doctrine they espoused. Instead, the suggestion of Graeber, that definitions of anarchism should also be inclusive of those who display anarchist attitudes and practices, as well as those who endorse a specific ideological position, has far more merit.

However, if we decide that Jesus might well meet the rather broader definition of “anarchist” of the kind offered by Graeber, we will need to accept some things that, at least to many contemporary anarchists, appear incompatible with anarchism. For example, as Kathleen Corley has noted, Jesus does not appear to have criticised patriarchy,²⁵⁷ and our sources are silent about his thoughts on slavery, something ubiquitous in the empire. Even his proclamation of the kingdom of God could be seen to replicate elements of the imperialism that appears anathema to it.²⁵⁸ But such problems should not preclude us from using the label “anarchist” for Jesus. As Barclay has observed in his study of ethnographic accounts of stateless and governmentless societies, we cannot expect contemporary anarchists to necessarily approve of such societies, which though highly decentralised, can, for example, be highly conformist, patriarchal, gerontocracies,²⁵⁹ yet the use of the term anarchist is clearly legitimate for them. So, our use of the term “anarchist” outside of the modern context, where individuals and movements may display characteristics that are similarly unappealing to contemporary anarchists, has to be generous.

There is enough in what we can know about the historical Jesus, of the impressions of the man and his vision that have left their mark on our sources, to reveal someone not just intensely anti-authoritarian but also concerned with a prefigurative, non-coercive reality which would both confront existing inequity and be transformative of the lives of those oppressed by it. It may be pushing the evidence too far to say that Jesus of Nazareth was “a major political thinker”,²⁶⁰ but it is no surprise, to return to the quote with which we began, that Alexander Berkman believed Jesus to be an anarchist. He was right.²⁶¹

Notes

1. Alexander Berkman, *Now and After: The ABC of Communist Anarchism* (New York, NY: Vanguard Press, 1929), 61.
2. The term "anarchist" had been used before this date but was employed solely to refer to someone who sought to create disorder rather than an advocate of a political ideology. It acquired the additional meaning following the publication of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Qu'est-ce que la propriété? Ou recherches sur le principe du droit et du gouvernement* (Paris: Librairie de Prévot, 1840).
3. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, "Der Antichrist," in *Nietzsches Werke: Der Fall Wagner; Götzen-Dämmerung; Nietzsche contra Wagner; Der Antichrist; Gedichte* (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1895), 211–313.
4. See, for example, Nicolai Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), 140–48.
5. See, for example, Leo Tolstoy, "*The Kingdom of God Is Within You*": *Christianity Not as a Mystic Religion but as a New Theory of Life*, trans. Constance Garnett, 2 vols. (London: William Heinemann, 1894). However, it is important to note that Tolstoy did not explicitly call Jesus an "anarchist". This is probably explained by the close association between anarchism and violence in Tolstoy's mind, something that almost certainly accounts for his reticence in using the label for himself too. See Brian Morris, *Ecology and Anarchism: Essays and Reviews on Contemporary Thought* (Malvern: Images Publishing, 1996), 159.
6. Likewise, Wilde did not use the term "anarchist" for Jesus but that he believed him to be one is a reasonable inference from such works as *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* in which Jesus is presented as the model of socialist individualism. Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (London: Privately Printed, 1891). See Kristian Williams, "The Soul of Man under . . . Anarchism?," *New Politics* 8.2 (2011), <http://newpol.org/content/soul-man-under-anarchism>. [accessed 12 July 2023]. For the anarchism of Wilde, see David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow*, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 62–92.
7. Mary C. Segers, "Equality and Christian Anarchism: The Political and Social Ideas of the Catholic Worker Movement," *The Review of Politics* 40.2 (1978): 196–230, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500027935>. See also, Frederick George Boehrer, "Christian Anarchism and the Catholic Worker Movement: Roman

Catholic Authority and Identity in the United States" (PhD thesis, Syracuse University, 2001).

8. See www.jesusradicals.com [accessed 12 July 2023].
9. Charlotte Elisheve Alston, *Tolstoy and His Disciples: The History of a Radical International Movement* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).
10. See, for example, the official website of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, the main body of Doukhobors today: <http://www.usccdoukhobors.org/faq.htm#faq2> [accessed 12 July 2023].
11. Linda H. Damico, *The Anarchist Dimension of Liberation Theology* (Pieterlen: Peter Lang, 1987).
12. See, for example, Keith Hebden, *Dalit Theology and Christian Anarchism* (London: Ashgate, 2011).
13. See Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Jésus et les origines du christianisme*, ed. Clément Rochel, 3rd ed. (Paris: G. Havard fils, 1896). This was Proudhon's most substantial work on the subject. However, see also Proudhon, *Écrits sur la religion*, ed. M. Ruysen (Paris: M. Rivière, 1959). For a comprehensive treatment of Proudhon's views on Jesus, see Georges Bessière, *Jésus selon Proudhon: La « messianose » et la naissance du christianisme* (Paris: Cerf, 2007); Henri de Lubac, *Proudhon et le Christianisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1945).
14. Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, *God and the State* (London: Freedom Press, 1910 [1882]), 54.
15. Peter Kropotkin, *Ethics, Origin and Development*, trans. Louis S. Friedland and Joseph R. Piroshnikoff (Bristol: Thoemes Press, 1993 [1924]), 118–19.
16. Max Stirner, *The Ego and His Own*, trans. Steven T. Byington (New York, NY: Benj. R. Tucker, 1907), 178–79.
17. This distinction is usually attributed to Martin Kähler, and became common following the publication of his *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der eschichtliche, biblische Christus* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1892), although it was employed to describe something that most scholars of the historical Jesus would argue was common from the work of Herman Reimarus and the posthumous publication of his *Fragmente eines Ungenannten* beginning in 1774.
18. See, for example, S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967). See also the comprehensive response of Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule, eds., *Jesus and the Politics of His*

Day (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Amongst recent contributions, those of Fernando Bermejo-Rubio are of greatest consequence. See, for example, Fernando Bermejo-Rubio, "Jesus and the Anti-Roman Resistance," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 12.1 (2014): 1–105, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455197-01202001>; Bermejo-Rubio, "Jesus as a Seditious: The Intertwining of Politics and Religion in His Teaching and Deeds," in *Teaching the Historical Jesus: Issues and Exegesis*, ed. Zev Garber (London: Routledge, 2015), 232–43.

19. See, for example, Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); Marcus Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (London: Continuum, 1994), 97–126. For a trenchant critique of attempts to present the historical Jesus as "inclusive", see Markus Bockmuehl, "The Trouble with the Inclusive Jesus," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 33.1 (2011): 9–23, <https://doi.org/10.1163/019590811X571689>.
20. See, for indicative examples, Colleen Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Michael J. Sandford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014).
21. For significant contributions in this area, see James G. Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Neoliberalism: Quests, Scholarship and Ideology* (London: Equinox, 2012); Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Terror: Scholarly Projects for a New American Century* (London: Equinox, 2008); Halvor Moxnes, Ward Blanton, and James G. Crossley, eds., *Jesus beyond Nationalism: Constructing the Historical Jesus in a Period of Cultural Complexity* (London: Routledge, 2009).
22. For the most recent, comprehensive statement of this position, see Richard Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014). See also Thomas L. Thompson and Thomas S. Verenna, eds., "Is This Not the Carpenter?": *The Question of the Historicity of the Figure of Jesus* (London: Equinox, 2012).
23. See, for example, Maurice Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Bart D. Ehrman, *Did*

Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2012).

24. See, for example, John Granger Cook, *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002); Craig A. Evans, "Jesus in Non-Christian Sources," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 443–78.
25. For a useful survey of non-canonical sources of various kinds, see James H. Charlesworth and Craig A. Evans, "Jesus in the Agrapha and Apocryphal Gospels," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 479–534.
26. See, for example, the pagan critic Celsus in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.28.
27. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 12.
28. For the inconsequential nature of Jesus' life from the perspective of the Romans, see Justin J. Meggitt, "The Madness of King Jesus: Why Was Jesus Put To Death, but His Followers Were Not?," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29.4 (2007): 379–413, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X07078990>.
29. George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 36.
30. Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2011), 19.
31. Few, if any, have paid attention to non-canonical sources despite their significance in contemporary scholarship concerned with the figure of the historical Jesus. For example, as Patterson rightly notes, "anyone who writes today on the historical question of what Jesus said or did must deal with the issue of the Gospel of Thomas". Stephen J. Patterson, "The Gospel of Thomas and Historical Jesus Research," in *Coptica — Gnostica — Manichaica*, ed. Louis Painchaud and Paul-Hubert Poirier (Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006), 633.
32. Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*, 15, 295.
33. Tolstoy, for example, called him, "the lover of authoritarian teaching", and held him chiefly responsible for Christianity's departure from Jesus' vision. Leo Tolstoy, *Church and State and Other Essays: Including Money; Man and Woman: Their Respective Functions;*

- The Mother; A Second Supplement to the Kreutzer Sonata* (Boston, MA: B. R. Tucker, 1891), 17.
34. James D. G. Dunn, "Jesus Tradition in Paul," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 155–78.
 35. Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*, 43–81.
 36. See, for example, Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995); W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew. Introduction and Commentary on Matthew I-VII*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 429–731; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, 2nd ed., Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).
 37. Huub van de Sandt and Jürgen K. Zangenberg, eds., *Matthew, James, and Didache: Three Related Documents in Their Jewish and Christian Settings*, SBLSymS 45 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); David C. Sim and Boris Repschinski, eds., *Matthew and His Christian Contemporaries* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008). It is no surprise that Tolstoy was keen on the *Didache*, a text which was only rediscovered in his lifetime. See E. B. Greenwood, "Tolstoy and Religion," in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 166.
 38. See, for example, Leif E. Vaage, "Beyond Nationalism: Jesus the 'Holy Anarchist': The Cynic Jesus as Eternal Recurrence of the Repressed," in *Jesus beyond Nationalism: Constructing the Historical Jesus in a Period of Cultural Complexity*, ed. Halvor Moxnes, Ward Blanton, and James G. Crossley (London: Equinox, 2009), 79–95.
 39. Although I am not aware of Ched Myers identifying himself as a Christian anarchist, his commentary on Mark's gospel has been extremely influential on a number of contemporary Christian anarchists. See Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988). For an example of its significance, see Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*, 39–40. Myers has also written a very supportive preface to Mark van Steenwyk's primer on Christian anarchism, endorsing the notion that the Bible contains "anarchist tendencies" and "the anarchist vision may yet be a key to the renewal of church and society". Ched Meyers, "Foreword," in *That Holy Anarchist: Reflections on Christianity & Anarchism*, by Mark van Steenwyk (Minneapolis,

MN: Missio Dei, 2012), 9, 11.

40. It has become customary to refer to the study of the historical Jesus as the "Quest" for the historical Jesus, following the publication of Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (London: A&C Black, 1910).
41. See, for example, the criticisms of Bernard C. Lategan, "Questing or Sense-Making? Some Thoughts on the Nature of Historiography," *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 11.3 (2003): 588–601.
42. For a still useful, albeit confessional, critique of such undertakings, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).
43. See, for example, N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), xv.
44. Although characterising the historical Jesus' understanding of God as a matter of "belief" is, perhaps, unhelpful. "Belief" has a distinctive and specific place in some forms of Christianity but cannot be said to be a significant organising or nodal concept within the religious life of most humans, ancient or modern. See, for example, Malcolm Ruel, *Belief, Ritual and the Securing of Life: Reflective Essays on a Bantu Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 36–59.
45. For example, Mark 1.15 and Matt 4.17 (see also Luke 4.43); Luke 17.20–21, *Gos. Thom.* 3, 113; Matt 11.11–12, Luke 5.28, 16.16, *Gos. Thom.* 46; Mark 10.15, Matt 18.3, Luke 18.17; Mark 10.23–25, Matt 19.23–24, Luke 18.24–25; Luke 11.20, Matt 12.28; Matt 13.44; *Gos. Thom.* 109; Matt 13.45–46, *Gos. Thom.* 76; Mark 3.22–27, Matt 12.29–30, Luke 11.21–23; Mark 9.1 (see also Matt 16.28, Luke 9.27); Mark 14.25, Matt 26.29 (cf. Luke 22.18); Matt 8.11, Luke 13.28–30; Matt 6.10, Luke 11.2 and *Did.* 8.2.
46. Sébastien Faure, *Les douze preuves de l'inexistence de Dieu* (Paris: Librairie sociale, 1908).
47. See, for example, Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: HarperPress, 2012), 221–58.
48. Bakunin, *God and the State*, 28. For similar sentiments, see Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911), 22.

49. Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 26.
50. Nicholas Walter, *About Anarchism*, 2nd ed. (London: Freedom Press, 2002), 43.
51. Bernard Schweizer, *Hating God: The Untold Story of Misotheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 34.
52. Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 75.
53. For examples, see Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, ed., *Religious Anarchism: New Perspectives* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009); Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*.
54. Such ideas "are described as anarchist only on the basis of a misunderstanding of what anarchism is". Jeremy Jennings, "Anarchism," in *Contemporary Political Ideologies*, ed. Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 1999), 142.
55. Graham D. Macklin, "Co-Opting the Counter Culture: Troy Southgate and the National Revolutionary Faction," *Patterns of Prejudice* 39.3 (2005): 301–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220500198292>.
56. Both are mentioned a number of times in such standard histories as Robert Graham, ed., *Anarchism: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300CE to 1939). A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. 1 (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005); Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*; Woodcock, *Anarchism*. However, some surveys do pass over Christian anarchism. It is absent from, for example, Michael Schmidt, *Cartography of Revolutionary Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2013).
57. There are, of course, notable exceptions. See, for example, David Flusser, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007). The first edition of Flusser's work was published in 1965.
58. See the survey of the so-called "Third Quest" in John P. Meier, "The Present State of the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain," *Biblica* 80 (1999): 459–87. There have been significant differences of opinion on the relative weight that should be placed upon non-canonical sources in reconstructions. Contrast, for example, the use of non-canonical texts in Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, with that in John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume One: Roots of the Problem and the Person*, 5 vols. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991).

59. For a useful introduction to these, see Meier, *Roots of the Problem and the Person*. See also Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus: How to Study the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
60. These criteria are not new but have been used, in various forms, since the 1920s. See Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals*, JSNTSup 191 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 63–102.
61. Joel Willitts, “Presuppositions and Procedures in the Study of the Historical Jesus: Or, Why I Decided Not to Be a Historical Jesus Scholar,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3.1 (2005): 61–108, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476869005053903>.
62. For a helpful survey of these, see Helen K. Bond, *The Historical Jesus: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 19–36; David B. Gowler, *What Are They Saying about the Historical Jesus?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007).
63. Porter, *Criteria*; Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus: The Question of Criteria*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).
64. Morna Hooker, “Christology and Methodology,” *New Testament Studies* 17.4 (1971): 480–87, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500024176>.
65. Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010); Anthony Le Donne, *Historical Jesus: What Can We Know and How Can We Know It?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011); Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009); A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Jesus and the Historians*, WUNT 269 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 189–224.
66. Dale C. Allison, “It Don’t Come Easy: a History of Disillusionment,” in *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity*, ed. Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 186–99.
67. Although I place greater weight on the role of invention within the traditions associated with Jesus. See Justin J. Meggitt, “Popular Mythology in the Early Empire and the Multiplicity of Jesus Traditions,” in *Sources of the Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth*, ed. R. Joseph Hoffmann (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2010), 53–80, 269–275.
68. See, for example, Louis-André Dorion, “The Rise and Fall of the Socratic Problem,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, ed.

- Donald R. Morrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1–23.
69. See, for example, Maria Dzielska, *Apollonius of Tyana in Legend and History* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1986).
 70. As Fonrobert and Jaffee note about Rabbi Akiva, one of the key founders of Rabbinic Judaism, the nature of the sources make it impossible to know, "with any degree of historical certainty", whether he really said what is attributed to him. See Charlotte Elisheve Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, "Introduction: The Talmud, Rabbinic Literature, and Jewish Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Charlotte Elisheve Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.
 71. Meggitt, "Popular Mythology."
 72. A similar idea can be found in C. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel* (London: Nisbet, 1938). However, it was passed over by subsequent work in the field.
 73. Justin J. Meggitt, "Psychology and the Historical Jesus," in *Jesus and Psychology*, ed. Fraser Watts (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007), 24. Also quoted in Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History*, 433.
 74. Dale C. Allison, "Behind the Temptations of Jesus: Q 4:1-13 and Mark 1:12-13," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 195–213.
 75. Matt 4.8–10; Luke 4.5–8 (Mark 1.12–13). See Matt 20.26–27, 23.11–12, Mark 9.35, 10.43–44, Luke 14.11, 18.14b, 22.26; Matt 6.29, Luke 12.27; Luke 13.32; Matt 27.11, Mark 15.2, Luke 23.3; Luke 22.25; Luke 23.9; John 18.33–38; John 6.15.
 76. Allison, "It Don't Come Easy," 198. Although it could be said that this approach, albeit in an attenuated form, makes use of two familiar criteria, those of multiple attestation and, to a lesser extent, coherence.
 77. Matt 22.15–22.22, Mark 12.13–17, Luke 20.20–26, *Gos. Thom.* 100.
 78. See, for example, Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2011).
 79. Or rather the dominant group amongst those claiming this identity and which probably equated, more or less, with what the pagan critic Celsus called the "great church" (Origen, *Cels.* 5.59).
 80. For the gospels as biographies, see Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the*

Gospels?: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004); Dirk Frickenschmidt, *Evangelium als Biographie: die vier Evangelien im Rahmen antiker Erzählkunst*, TANZ 22 (Tübingen: Francke, 1997).

81. Though obviously there was considerable variation. See Tomas Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
82. Haia Shpayer-Makov, "Anarchism in British Public Opinion 1880-1914," *Victorian Studies* 31.4 (1988): 487.
83. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (London: J. M. Dent, 1907).
84. See, for example, "Italian Anarchists Kneecap Nuclear Executive and Threaten More Shootings", *The Guardian*, 2012
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/11/italian-anarchists-kneecap-nuclear-executive>> [accessed 12 July 2023]. See also Richard Bach Jensen, *The Battle against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History, 1878-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); John M. Merriman, *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-Siècle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror* (London: JR Books, 2009).
85. Though what constitutes "violence" is itself far from self-evident. For a discussion of definitional problems, see Willem Schinkel, *Aspects of Violence: A Critical Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 16–83.
86. See Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 158–64. See also Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive!: Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 78–108; Peter Gelderloos, *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).
87. See, for example, Cindy Milstein, *Anarchism and Its Aspirations* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010).
88. George R. Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868-1898* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 135.
89. Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 1996), 4.
90. Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 8.
91. A point made by Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 3.
92. Brian Morris, *Anthropology and Anarchism: Their Elective Affinity*, Goldsmiths Anthropology Research Papers 11 (London: Goldsmiths

- College, 2005), 6.
93. David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), 214.
 94. Graeber, *Direct Action*, 214.
 95. For Graeber, anarchism does not equate to any of these things and is best thought of "as that movement back and forth between these three." Graeber, *Direct Action*, 215.
 96. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 6.
 97. Peter Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement, 1918-21*, trans. L. Perlman and F. Perlman, 2nd ed. (London: Freedom Press, 2005).
 98. Murray Bookchin, *To Remember Spain: The Anarchist and Syndicalist Revolution of 1936* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 1995); Stuart Christie, *We the Anarchists: Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) 1927-1937* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2008); José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, ed. Chris Ealham, 3 vols. (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011).
 99. Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2004).
 100. For the centrality of anarchism in new movements of dissent, see Giorel Curran, *21st Century Dissent: Anarchism, Anti-Globalization and Environmentalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). For anarchists fighting in Rojava, see <https://thefreeonline.com/2015/07/08/anarchist-in-kobane/> [accessed 12 July 2023].
 101. For a very helpful survey of the debate, see F. Gerald Downing, "Jesus and Cynicism," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1105–36.
 102. For an attempt to explain the vitriolic response that this suggestion has elicited from some historical-Jesus scholars who see it as somehow denying Jesus' Jewishness, see William E. Arnal, "The Cipher 'Judaism' in Contemporary Historical Jesus Scholarship," in *Apocalypticism, Anti-Semitism and the Historical Jesus: Subtexts in Criticism*, ed. John S. Kloppenborg and John Marshall (London: Continuum, 2005), 24–54; Arnal, *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity* (London: Equinox, 2005).
 103. David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), 3.

104. Graeber, *Direct Action*, 211. It is unsurprising that Kropotkin's final, unfinished work was *Ethics, Origin and Development*.
105. Graeber, *Direct Action*, 216.
106. Graham, *Anarchism*, vol. 1.
107. Patricia Crone, "Ninth-Century Muslim Anarchists," *Past & Present* 167 (2000): 3–28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/167.1.3>. See also Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).
108. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (London: Pimlico, 2004), 214–22.
109. James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).
110. Morris, *Ecology and Anarchism*, 51.
111. See, for example, Brian Morris, *Kropotkin: The Politics of Community* (Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 2003), 202–3.
112. Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).
113. See, for example, John R. Love, *Antiquity and Capitalism: Max Weber and the Sociological Foundations of Roman Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1991).
114. Love, *Antiquity and Capitalism*, 4; Max Weber, *The Theory of Economic and Social Organizations*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York, NY: Free Press, 1964), 280.
115. See, for example, Peter Temin, *The Roman Market Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
116. Particularly in comparison with China. See, Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). However, see Walter Scheidel, "From the 'Great Convergence' to the 'First Great Divergence': Roman and Qin-Han State Formation and Its Aftermath," in *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.
117. Although its size fluctuated somewhat, the Roman army of the early empire probably numbered around 300,000. Ramsay MacMullen, "How Big Was the Roman Imperial Army?," *Klio* 62 (1980): 451–60. See Tacitus, *Annales* 4.5.
118. The population of the Roman empire as a whole is difficult to

- calculate, but a figure of about 50 million would be accepted by most in the field. See Keith Hopkins, "Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire (200 B.C.-A.D. 400)," *Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980): 118, <https://doi.org/10.2307/299558>. However, Frier cautions that estimates of the gross population of the empire can be not more than a guess. See Bruce W. Frier, "More Is Worse: Some Observations on the Population of the Roman Empire," in *Debating Roman Demography*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 139.
119. David Christian, "State Formation in the Inner Eurasian Steppes," in *Worlds of the Silk Roads: Ancient and Modern*, ed. David Christian and Craig Benjamin (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 53.
 120. Max Weber, *Weber: Political Writings*, ed. Peter Lassman and Ronald Spiers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 310. Although such a definition famously has its weaknesses; see Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *American Political Science Review* 85.1 (1991): 77–96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1962879>.
 121. For the perils of ethnocentrism in historical-Jesus scholarship, see Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "Ethnocentrism and Historical Questions about Jesus," in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 27–43.
 122. Sam Mbah and I. E. Igariwey, *African Anarchism: A History and Analysis* (Tucson, AZ: See Sharp Press, 1997).
 123. Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Graham, *Anarchism*, 1:336–66.
 124. Graham, *Anarchism*, 1:367–89; Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
 125. Raymond Craib and Barry Maxwell, eds., *No Gods, No Masters, No Peripheries: Global Anarchisms* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2015).
 126. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*. See, for example, Harold B. Barclay, *People Without Government: An Anthropology of Anarchy* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1990); Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*; Joanna Overing, "Images of Cannibalism, Death and Domination in a 'Nonviolent' Society," *Journal de la Société des américanistes* 72 (1986): 133–56.
 127. Barclay, *People Without Government*, 18.
 128. Maurice Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching* (London: Continuum, 2010), 212. For a survey

- of the "kingdom of God" in critical scholarship, see Bruce Chilton, "The Kingdom of God in Recent Discussion," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 255–80.
129. A largely comprehensive presentation of the canonical data relating to the kingdom can be found in Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1971), 31–35. See also Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 663–70.
 130. *Gos. Thom.* 3, 54, 57, 76, 82, 96, 97, 98, 99, 107, 109, 113.
 131. For a critical evaluation, see Simon J. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 112–27.
 132. For a critical evaluation of the historicity of John, see Maurice Casey, *Is John's Gospel True?* (London: Routledge, 1996). For reassessments of its historical value, see Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History. Volume 1: Critical Appraisals of Critical Views* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); Anderson, Just, and Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History. Volume 2: Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).
 133. See also Luke 4.43. Note that Matthew uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven". This is generally preferred by Matthew to "kingdom of God" but is identical in meaning (compare, for example, Matt 13.11, Mark 4.11, and Luke 8.10).
 134. Matt 26.29, Mark 14.25.
 135. Luke 23.41–42.
 136. For a critical introduction to the evidence and current state of scholarship on the subject, see Eric Eve, *The Healer from Nazareth: Jesus' Miracles in Historical Context* (London: SPCK, 2009). For indicative examples of others believed to be healers and exorcists at the time, see Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae* 8.45–48; Lucian, *Philopseudes* 11, 16; Origen, *Cels.* 1.68.
 137. For a useful introduction to these, see James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1992).
 138. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Princeton, NJ: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 316.
 139. Matt 13.11; Mark 4.11; Luke 8.10.
 140. See, for example, Matt 13.24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47; 18.23, 20.1; 22.2,

25.1.

141. For the surprising degree of agreement on this between scholars with quite different ideological positions, see, for example, Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), 46; Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 212; Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 266; Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 142; Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Christ*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 3; Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium*. (New York, NY: Polebridge, 1996), 41; Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 196; Gerd Lüdemann, *Jesus after Two Thousand Years: What He Really Said and Did* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 689; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 139; Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 119–51; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 11.
142. Markus Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 81.
143. The phrase "kingdom of God" does not appear in the Hebrew Bible. However, the kingship or reign of God is a major theme (for example, Exod 15.1–18; Isa 6.5–9; Ps 99.1–5) and is also present in some non-canonical Jewish texts (for example, *Sib. Or.* 3.46f; *As. Mos.* 10; 1QM 2.7, 6.6). A related idea, that of the "Day of the Lord", in which God was expected to intervene directly in history to judge both Israel and her enemies is a common motif in prophetic literature (for example, Isa 13.6–9, Joel 2, Mal 4.1–6).
144. The Greek word for parable, παραβολή, is used in the following texts: Matt 13.3, 10, 18, 24, 31, 35, 53; 15.15; 21.33, 45; 22.1; Mark 3.23, 4.2, 10, 11, 13, 30, 33, 34; 7.17; 12.1, 12; Luke 5.36; 6.39; 8.4, 9, 10, 11; 12.16, 41; 13.6; 14.7; 15.3; 18.1, 9; 19.11; 20.9, 19; 21.2. Most parables relate, either directly or indirectly, to the kingdom of God/heaven.
145. This is true of most parabolic material but not all (see, for example, Mark 7.17; Luke 14.7). We should be wary of approaches to the parables of Jesus that do not take account of such diversity. See Peter Dschulnigg, "Positionen des Gleichnisverständnisses im 20. Jahrhundert: kurze Darstellung von fünf wichtigen Positionen der Gleichnistheorie," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 45.4 (1989): 347.
146. Ruben Zimmermann, "How to Understand the Parables of Jesus: A Paradigm Shift in Parable Exegesis.," *Acta Theologica* 29.1 (2009): 175.

147. The sayings that conclude a number of parables are often allusive and are usually thought to be secondary additions. For example, the saying "the first will be last and the last first" is found as a conclusion to the Parable of the Householder in Luke (13.23–30), but appears as the conclusion to the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard in Matthew (20.1–16), as well as in non-parabolic material (Matt 19.30, Mark 10.31).

148. Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 58. For surveys of the parables of Jesus in critical scholarship, see Dschulnigg, "Positionen des Gleichnisverständnisses," 335–51; David B. Gowler, *What Are They Saying about the Parables?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000); Klyne Snodgrass, "From Allegorizing to Allegorizing: A History of the Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus," in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, ed. Richard Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 3–29.

149. Indicated by such sayings as:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news. (Mark 1.15, Matt 4.17; see also Luke 4.43)

Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power. (Mark 9.1; see also Matt 16.28, Luke 9.27)

150. Indicated by such sayings as:

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; 21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17.20–21; cf. *Gos. Thom.* 3, 113)

But if it is by the Spirit [finger] of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. (Matt 12:28; Luke 11.20)

Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. (Matt 11.11–12; Luke 5.28, 16.16; *Gos. Thom.* 46)

151. For useful surveys of the problem, see Heinz Giesen, *Herrschaft Gottes, heute oder morgen?: zur Heilsbotschaft Jesu und der synoptischen Evangelien*, BU 26 (Regensburg: Pustet, 1995).

152. Bruce J. Malina, "Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51.1 (1989): 1–31. However, *contra* Malina, there is evidence that some people in the early empire were quite literal and linear (or "Swiss" as Malina puts it) in their interpretation of future-oriented language. See, for example, 1 Thess 4.13–18; 2 Pet 3.4; Cook, *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism*, 192.
153. See Benedict Viviano, "Eschatology and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," in *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 73–90.
154. Contrary to the position of, for example, Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*; Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, 47–96; Stephen J. Patterson, *God of Jesus: The Historical Jesus and the Search for Meaning* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998). For a helpful analysis of the question, see Robert J. Miller, ed., *The Apocalyptic Jesus: A Debate* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2001).
155. The degree of imminence can, for instance, affect both the character and content of the ethical demands of Jesus. For example, Schweitzer claimed that Jesus' ethic was an "interim-ethik", temporary and transitory; "completely negative ... not so much an ethic as a penitential discipline" undertaken in preparation for the arrival of the kingdom. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 239. Peabody's criticisms of Schweitzer remain pertinent: "it is difficult to see in it [Jesus' ethics] a predominating quality of indifference to the world's affairs or of complete preoccupation with a supernatural catastrophe." Francis Peabody, "New Testament Eschatology and New Testament Ethics," *Harvard Theological Review* 2.1 (1909): 54.
156. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 163. For the theme of reversal in the ethics of Jesus, see Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984).
157. The theme of reversal is not solely concerned with things that can be reasonably categorised in this way. See, for example, Luke 6.21, 25.
158. For a general guide to the cultural context of the data relating to the historical Jesus, see Catherine Hezser, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison, and John Dominic Crossan, eds., *The Historical Jesus in Context*, Princeton Readings in Religions (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

159. See Luke 6.20, 24 (cf. Matt 5.3). See also Matt 19.16–24; Mark 10:17–25; Luke 18.18–25.
160. Luke 6.21; see also Matt 6.11, Luke 11.3; Matt 15.32, Mark 8.3.
161. Matt 21.31–32 (Matt 9.9, Mark 2.14, Luke 5.28; Luke 18.10, 19.2). The elders were a non-priestly group who, with the scribes and chief priests, made up the Sanhedrin. They were the local aristocracy and consisted of "the heads of the most influential lay families". Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 223.
162. Matt 18.3, 19.14; Mark 10.14; Luke 10.21, 18.16.
163. See Luke 15.11–32; Matt 18.10–14, Luke 15.3–7; Matt 10.6; Matt 15.24. The term "sinner" can have a range of meanings but is best understood, in this period, as including those "who act as if there is no God, people who do not observe the [Jewish] Law (or certain interpretations of the Law), people who were effectively outside of God's covenant with Israel, and people contrasted with the 'righteous'". James G. Crossley, *Reading the New Testament: Contemporary Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2010), 91.
164. Matt 9.21–22, Luke 10.13–14; Luke 10.25–37; Luke 17.11–19; Matt 8.5–13, Luke 7.1–10 cf. John 4.1–42; though see Matt 15.21–28, Mark 7.24–30; Matt 6.32, Luke 12.30; Matt 10.5; cf. Luke 9.52.
165. Mark 10.46, Luke 18.35.
166. Mark 12.41–44, Luke 21.1–4.
167. Most famously, "Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Matt 19.30; see also Matt 20.16; Mark 10.31; Luke 13.30; Mark 9.35; *Gos. Thom.* 4).
168. For example, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." (Luke 14.12–13).
169. For example, "Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you." (Matt 21.31).
170. Matt 22.1–14, Luke 14.15–24, *Gos. Thom.* 64.
171. Luke 14.21.
172. Luke 16.19–31. Yet a rich person might normally be assumed, like Abraham, to be blessed by God (Gen 13.2; Prov 10.22).

173. See Matt 25.31–46. For the interpretation of verse 45, see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew. Commentary on Matthew XIX–XXVIII*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 428–29. It should be emphasised that in one sense the reversal here is a typical one within first-century Judaism (see, for example, 2 Esd 2.20–23). Concern for the "least" and was a consistent feature of Jewish ethical thinking, from the earliest prophetic texts onwards (see, for example, Amos 2.6–8, 4.1–3, 5.10–13, 8.4–6; Mal 3.5).
174. Luke 12.16–21; *Gos. Thom.* 63.
175. For example, Mark 2.4, 15–17; Luke 7.36–48, 8.2; 19.2–10; John 7.53–8.11.
176. The theme of conflict is so pervasive that 'conflict stories' constitute a distinctive and widely distributed form of the traditions associated with the historical Jesus. See, for example, Arland J. Hultgren, *Jesus and His Adversaries: The Form and Function of the Conflict Stories in the Synoptic Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1979).
177. There is a pervasive theme of hostility to wealth in the Jesus tradition (see, for example, Matt 6.24, Luke 16.13; Luke 12.13–21; Matt 6.29, Luke 12.27; Matt 19.24, Mark 10.25, Luke 18.25; Matt 24.17, Mark 13.15; Luke 16.14–15; Luke 17.31). Real treasure is said to be located in heaven (Matt 6.20; Luke 12.33; Matt 19.21, Mark 10.21, Luke 18.22; Matt 6.2, Luke 16.13; Luke 12.13–14, cf. *Gos. Thom.* 72). The recurrent attacks on the rich show that this hostility to wealth is not motivated by asceticism but on an assumed relationship between poverty and wealth (see Luke 19.1–9; Matt 19.21, Mark 10.21, Luke 18.22). An indication of such thinking might be visible in Mark 10.19 where the command not to defraud is added by Jesus to a series of commandments otherwise taken from the Ten Commandments cf. Luke 19.8; James 5.4; Deut 5.6–11, Exod 20.1–17.
178. Matt 5.40, Luke 6.29 cf. Luke 18.2–6.
179. Matt 15.5, Mark 7.11; Matt 23.1–36, Mark 12.37b–40, Luke 20.45–47; Mark 12.41–13.4, 21.1–7.
180. See Matt 5.41.
181. Note, for example, the destitution that resulted from illness: "She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse" (Mark 5.26, Luke 8.43); "I was a mason, earning a living with my hands; I beg you, Jesus, restore my health to me, so that I need not beg for my

- food in shame." (*Gos. Naz.* in Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 12.13). The free nature of the healing offered by Jesus and his followers was clearly significant (Matt 10.5).
182. Davies and Allison, *Gospel According to Saint Matthew I–VII*, 546–47. Cf. Mark 15.21; Epictetus, *Diatribai* 4.1.79.
 183. Walter Wink, "Neither Passivity nor Violence: Jesus' Third Way (Matt 5:38//Luke 6:29-30)," in *The Love of Enemy and Non-Retaliatioin in the New Testament*, ed. Willard M Swartley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 111.
 184. Matt 5.44; Luke 6.27, 35; Rom 12.12–21. See William Klassen, "The Authenticity of the Command: 'Love Your Enemies,'" in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 385–407. Such non-violent resistance was a significant strand within first-century Judaism. See Gordon Zerbe, *Non-Retaliatioin in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts: Ethical Themes in Social Contexts*, JSPSup 13 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). For examples, see Josephus, *A.J.* 18.55–59; *B.J.* 2.175–203.
 185. In the case with the woman with the haemorrhage, in the earliest rendering of this tradition, her healing comes about as a result of her own decision and action not that of Jesus (Mark 5.29, Luke 8.44; cf. Matt 9.22). In the case of the Syrophoenician woman, she convinces a reluctant Jesus to heal her daughter (Matt 15.21–28, Mark 7.24–30). See also Matt 9.1–8, Mark 2.1–12, Luke 5.17–26; Matt 8.28–34, Mark 5.1–20, Luke 8.26–39.
 186. See, for example, the command to "hate" families: Luke 14.26–27, cf. Matt 10.37–39. See also Matt 12.46–50, Mark 3.31–35, Luke 8.19–21; Matt 19.29; Mark 10.29, Luke 18.29b; Matt 8.21–22, Luke 9.59–60. However, cf. Matt 19.19, Mark 10.19, Luke 18.20; Matt 15.4, Mark 7.10.
 187. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1995), 107. For a persuasive and important criticism of Fiorenza and similar attempts to present Jesus as a critic of patriarchy, see Kathleen E. Corley, *Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2002).
 188. Matt 12.46–50, Mark 3.31–35, Luke 8.19–21; Matt 19.19, Mark 10.30, Luke 18.30.
 189. Luke 14.12.
 190. Matt 5.42, Luke 6.30; Matt 6.12–13, Luke 11.4; Matt 18.21–35; Luke 12.33; Matt 19.21, Mark 10.21, Luke 18.22; Luke 14.33, Matt 6.4, 20;

Luke 6.34-35.

191. See David Charles Kraemer, "Food, Eating and Meals," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 403–19; Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity throughout the Ages* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).
192. For a description of this, Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 261–64.
193. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 69.
194. See, for example, Matt 9.10, Mark 2.15, Luke 5.29; Matt 26.6, Mark 14.3; *Gos. Thom.* 61.
195. Matt 11.19, Luke 7.34.
196. Matt 9.11, Mark 2.16, Luke 5.30.
197. Luke 14.12–14.
198. Matt 22.1–14, Luke 14.16–24, *Gos. Thom.* 64; Matt 25.10 (cf. Matt 9.15, Mark 2.19, Luke 9.34); Luke 12.37, 15.23.
199. The feeding of the five thousand: Matt 14.13–21, Mark 6.30–44, Luke 9.10–17. The feeding of the four thousand: Matt 15.32–39, Mark 8.1–10.
200. Matt 8.11, Luke 13.29. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that a symbolic meal, associated with the kingdom, would become the central rite in early Christianity and was legitimised, probably with good reason, by appeal to an event in the life of the historical Jesus. See Matt 26.26–29, Mark 14.22–25, Luke 22.15–20; 1 Cor 11.23–25. Cf. Justin, *1 Apol.* 66.3.
201. Something that owed itself to the universal tradition within Judaism. See Jacob Neusner, *Recovering Judaism: The Universal Dimension of Jewish Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2001). Second Temple Jewish literature shows a range of ideas about the ultimate fate of the gentiles, some of which involved their inclusion in salvation. See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 289–98. The tradition found in Matt 8.11 and Luke 13.29 may not be as self-evidently universal as it is often assumed, as Allison quite rightly notes. Dale C. Allison, "Who Will Come from East and West? Observations on Matt. 8.11–12 = Luke 13.28–29," *Irish Biblical Studies* 11 (1989): 158–70. Nonetheless, the implication is certainly there. See Michael F. Bird, "Who Comes from the East and the West? Luke 13.28–29/Matt 8.11–12 and the Historical Jesus," *New Testament Studies* 52.4 (2006): 441–57.

202. For cosmopolitanism, see A. A. Long, "The Concept of the Cosmopolitan in Greek & Roman Thought," *Daedalus* 137.3 (2008): 50–58, <https://doi.org/10.1162/daed.2008.137.3.50>; Catherine Lu, "The One and Many Faces of Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8.2 (2000): 244–67, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9760.00101>.
203. Carl Levy, "Anarchism and Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 16.3 (2011): 265–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2011.607293>.
204. See, for example, Matt 22.16, Mark 12.14, Luke 20.21; Matt 7.21, Luke 6.46. Jesus' initial silence when questioned by the high priest (Matt 26.63, Mark 14.61), Herod (Luke 23.9), and Pilate (Matt 27.11–14, Mark 15.1–4, Luke 23.2–5) could be interpreted as deliberately insolent. See also the exchange in Matthew 21.23–27, Mark 11:27–33, Luke 20.1–8.
205. Such impartiality is regarded as characteristic of God in the biblical tradition (for example, Lev 19.15 cf. Acts 10.34, Rom 2.11) and appears to be particularly associated with the rule of God in the New Testament (Matt 5.45; cf. also Matt 5.44, Luke 6.27, 35; Matt 6.14, Luke 11:4).
206. For understanding the implications of departing from cultural expectations of deference and the problems of "face" it would raise, see Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). See also Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers*, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
207. Luke 8.3; Matt 9.9–13, Mark 2.13–17, Luke 5.27–32; Luke 19.2; Matt 8.5, Luke 7.2.
208. Bockmuehl, "The Trouble with the Inclusive Jesus," 14.
209. See, for example, Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 200. See Matt 4.17, Mark 1.15; Mark 6.7, 12; Luke 15.11–32; Matt 18.10–14, Luke 15.3–7; Matt 12.38–42; Luke 11.29–32; Luke 13.1–9. Contra Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 106–13. Cf. Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 282–84.
210. It is related to the idea in the Hebrew Bible that a sinful Israel needs to return to God (Isaiah 44.22, 55.7), a common theme, particularly in traditions concerned with the "Day of the Lord" (for example, Joel 2.32).
211. See Luke 19.1–9; Matt 19.21, Mark 10.21, Luke 18.22. For the

- expectation of restitution, see Leviticus 6.1–5, Numbers 5.5–7.
212. See, for example, Matt 12.28, Luke 11.20; Matt 10.34–36, Luke 12.49–56; Matt 11.2–6, Luke 7.18–23.
 213. See, for example, Luke 5.32; Matt 9.13; Matt 5.21, 27, 33, 39, 44.
 214. Wedderburn, *Jesus and the Historians*, 275–322; Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, 512–67; H. J. de Jonge, “The Historical Jesus’ View of Himself and of His Mission,” in *From Jesus to John*, ed. Martinus de Boer (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 21–37; Ben Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1990).
 215. For example, Matt 10.1–5; Mark 3.16–19, 4.10, 6.7, 9.35; Luke 6.13–16; John 6.67; Acts 1.13, 6.2; 1 Cor 15.5.
 216. For example, Luke 10.9–16, Matt 10.7–16; Luke 12.8–9 and Matt 12.32–33.
 217. Bakunin, *God and the State*, 33. See Simon Western, “Autonomist Leadership in Leaderless Movements: Anarchists Leading the Way,” *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 14.4 (2014): 673–98.
 218. See Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
 219. See also Matt 20.20–28, Luke 22.24–27; Matt 18.1–5, Mark 9.33–37, Luke 9.46–48; see John 13.1–11.
 220. Ched Myers, “Foreword,” in *That Holy Anarchist: Reflections on Christianity & Anarchism*, by Mark van Steenwyk (Minneapolis, MN: Missio Dei, 2012), 8.
 221. 1 Sam 8.4–18 includes a stinging critique of the exploitation that results from monarchy.
 222. The idea that the Messiah would be identified by the healings he carried out, assumed in the tradition of Jesus’ answer to John the Baptist (Matt 11.2–6, Luke 7.18–23) is almost entirely absent from our sources for Jewish messianic expectations at the time. It can only be found in Dead Sea Scroll 4Q521. See Lidija Novakovic, “4Q521: The Works of the Messiah or the Signs of the Messianic Time?,” in *Qumran Studies*, ed. Michael Thomas Davis and Brent A. Strawn (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007), 208–31.
 223. For example, Matt 10.8, Luke 10.9.
 224. Matt 19.28, Luke 22.28–30. Cf. *Pss. Sol.* 17.26. Gerd Theissen, “Gruppenmessianismus: Überlegungen zum Ursprung der Kirche im Jüngerkreis Jesu,” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 7 (1992): 101–23.

225. This is most obvious in the arrest narratives. See Matt 26.47–56, Mark 14.43–52, Luke 22.47–53, John 18.1–11.
226. Benjamin Franks, *Rebel Alliances: The Means and Ends of Contemporary British Anarchisms* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006), 93.
227. Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 98.
228. Matt 13.31, Mark 4.31; Luke 13.18–19, *Gos. Thom.* 20.
229. Graeber, *Direct Action*, 203.
230. Matt 21.13, Mark 11.15–19, Luke 19.45–48, John 2.13–17.
231. Matt 22.15–22, Mark 12.13–17, Luke 20.20–26, *Gos. Thom.* 100, *Egerton Papyrus* 2.
232. Matt 26.57–27.26, Mark 14.53–15.15, Luke 22.54–25, John 18.12–19.16.
233. Graeber, *Direct Action*, 114.
234. See, for example, Matt 17.19–27; Matt 18.3, Mark 9.15, Luke 18.17.
235. Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 75.
236. Justin J. Meggitt, “Review of Mary Ann Beavis, *Jesus & Utopia: Looking for the Kingdom of God in the Roman World* (2006),” *Utopian Studies* 18.2 (2007): 281–84.
237. See, for example, the use of a fictional anarchist utopia in Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (New York, NY: HarperPrism, 1974).
238. See the classic anarchist critique of Marie Louise Berneri, *Journey through Utopia* (London: Freedom Press, 1982).
239. Franks, *Rebel Alliances*, 99.
240. Matt 15.21–28, Mark 7.24–30.
241. Matt 13.53–58, Mark 6.1–6a; cf. Luke 4.16–30.
242. Matt 16.13–23, Mark 8.27–33, Luke 9.18–22.
243. See, for example, Bockmuehl, *This Jesus*, 86.
244. Henry Joel Cadbury, *The Peril of Modernizing Jesus* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1937), 141.
245. Judith Suissa, *Anarchism and Education: A Philosophical Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 149.
246. Justin Mueller, “Anarchism, the State, and the Role of Education,” in *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education*, ed. Robert H. Haworth (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 14.

247. Mueller, "Anarchism," 18–19.
248. Matt 5.44; Luke 6.27, 35 (Rom 12.12–21).
249. Matt 19.3–12, Mark 10.2–12; Matt 5.31–32; Luke 16.18 (1 Cor 7.10).
250. For example, Matt 22.1–14, Luke 14.15–24, *Gos. Thom.* 64; Matt 25.31–46; Luke 10.25–37; 15.11–32; 16.19–31.
251. Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism*, 118.
252. Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 383.
253. For the use of the term, see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 86, 98.
254. A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 16.
255. Matt 27.37, Mark 15.26, Luke 23.38, John 19.19, 21.
256. For further discussion of this, see Meggitt, "Madness."
257. See Corley, *Women and the Historical Jesus*. Jesus' message clearly appealed to some women, who were significant in the early movement, but probably because it embodied the more liberative tendencies visible in some forms of Judaism of the time, and elsewhere in the empire, or because of what it offered the poor and oppressed more generally.
258. A point forcefully made in James G. Crossley, *Jesus and the Chaos of History: Redirecting the Life of the Historical Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 64–95.
259. Barclay, *People Without Government*, 18.
260. Paul Chambers, "Review of Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary by Alexandre Christoyannopoulos," *Anarchist Studies* 20.1 (2012): 110.
261. For those who reject such a capacious understanding of the term "anarchist", at the very least there is sufficient evidence here to say that the historical Jesus displayed "an anarchist sensibility", and can legitimately be ranked alongside other figures like Aurobindo, Berdyaev, Blake, Gandhi and Tolstoy who are described in such a way by Brian Morris. See Brian Morris, "Review of Paul Cudenec, *The Anarchist Revelation: Being What We Are Meant to Be*," *Anarchist Studies* 23.1 (2015): 112.

CHAPTER 5.

THE MADNESS OF KING JESUS: WHY WAS JESUS PUT TO DEATH, BUT HIS FOLLOWERS WERE NOT?

STATING THE CONUNDRUM

“They called me mad, and I called them mad, and damn them, they out voted me.” Nathaniel Lee¹

That Jesus of Nazareth was put to death by the Romans on a cross is one of those rare pieces of biographical data that is almost entirely uncontested. It is, of course, multiply attested in the earliest Christian and non-Christian sources,² and it was not doubted by any of the critics of the new religion.³ Crucifixion was an ignoble and unappealing end, and one that it is hard to imagine anyone in the early church would have wanted to fabricate about their founder.⁴ The reason *why* he was put to death is somewhat harder to fathom. However, it is something that must be answered if we are to make any sense of the historical Jesus. As James Dunn has remarked:

In recent questioning it has been more widely recognized that a test of any hypothesis' viability is whether it provides a satisfactory answer to the question, "Why was Jesus crucified?" To be "historical" the historical Jesus must have been crucifiable.⁵

Explanations for Jesus' execution abound although most commentators concede that it is difficult to prove for certain the exact cause. It did not take much to end up on a cross in

the empire, if you were a non-citizen and of low status. A quote from Juvenal is illustrative of the casual, summary way that an individual with the power of life or death could arrive at the decision to crucify someone they believed of no consequence:

“Crucify that slave”, says the wife. “But what crime worthy of death has he committed?”, asks the husband. “Where are the witnesses? Who informed against him? Give him a hearing at least. No delay can be too long when a man’s life is at stake.” “What a fool you are! Do you call a slave a man? Do you say he has done no wrong? This is my will and my command. Take it as authority for the deed.” (Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.219–23)

Under the rule of Pilate, ending up on a cross seems to have been a reasonably easy thing to achieve as the governor had a reputation for repeatedly executing people without trial.⁶ So despite the importance of determining *why* Jesus was put to death, this may ultimately be something unknowable. It could have been decided on little more than a whim. Indeed, it could have even been an accident, a possibility that A. E. Harvey suggests:

Jesus could have been one of those innocent victims who are picked up by police action at a time when peace-keeping has become difficult and the forces of law and order are over-stretched, and then arbitrarily put to death.⁷

Nonetheless, most commentators have maintained Jesus was put to death by the Romans for a reason of some kind: he either thought of himself, or was thought of by others, to be King of the Jews. And there are, on the face of it, good grounds for holding this opinion. As Gerhard Schneider observes of the earliest account of Jesus’ appearance before Pilate, that of Mark, “the messianic, or in other words, the kingly claim is ... the only point of the accusation that is brought into the open”⁸ (and this is true of Matthew too, who follows Mark closely). Luke does specify

the charges alluded to in Mark 15.4 and Matthew 27.13 yet once again the kingly claim is prominent amongst these: in Luke 23.2 Jesus is accused of διαστρέφοντα τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν (“perverting our nation”), κωλύοντα φόρους Καίσαρι διδόναι (“forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar”) but the final accusation is that Jesus is saying that ἐαυτὸν Χριστὸν βασιλέα εἶναι (“he himself is Christ a king”). In John too the kingly claim is uppermost in the accusation: Ἐὰν τοῦτον ἀπολύσῃς, οὐκ εἶ φίλος τοῦ Καίσαρος: πᾶς ὁ βασιλέα ἐαυτὸν ποιῶν ἀντιλέγει τῷ Καίσαρι (“If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor”).⁹ This common emphasis of the gospels, when combined with the fact that all the evangelists agree that an inscription was placed on the cross which declared Jesus to be ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων,¹⁰ a decidedly Roman rather than Jewish or early Christian expression,¹¹ makes this explanation seem all the more reasonable.¹²

All this, I imagine, is fairly uncontroversial, but there is a conundrum and one that is reasonably well known but not one that I believe has been very convincingly solved. If Jesus was put to death by the Romans as a royal pretender *why were none of his followers killed or even pursued?* This is a paradox, right at the heart of current reconstructions of the historical Jesus. So, for example, E. P. Sanders observes:

We recall the surest facts: Jesus was executed by the Romans; his disciples were not rounded up and executed. In addition it was highly probable that he was executed for sedition or treason, as would-be king.¹³

From everything that we know of Roman policy concerning the treatment of royal pretenders or leaders of seditious movements, this failure to kill Jesus’ followers, or even pursue them, is perplexing to say the least. New Testament scholars are familiar enough with the accounts of Theudas and the Egyptian.¹⁴

Although the information that we possess about these figures raises a number of critical problems that do not need to be rehearsed here, one detail seems clear in both cases: the Roman forces made a point of slaughtering large numbers of their followers. The same, of course, occurred with the Samaritan prophet during the rule of Pilate. As Josephus says, having already killed a number of the prophet's supporters in an attack: "many prisoners were taken, of whom Pilate put to death the principal leaders and those who were most influential amongst the fugitives."¹⁵ A similar fate seems to have befallen the followers of the royal pretender Simon of Peraea in 4 BCE.¹⁶ Indeed, if we throw our net a little more widely, we find the same pattern of behaviour by the Roman authorities when faced with comparable leaders and movements elsewhere. For example, in the case of the slave king Eunus-Antiochus, the wonder-working Syrian who claimed that Atargatis-Astarte had promised him a crown,¹⁷ or Tacfarinas, the charismatic north African rebel leader,¹⁸ or Mariccus, the Gallic god-man,¹⁹ or the insurgent general Anicetus of Pontus,²⁰ the common practice seems to have been that not only would a seditious leader be killed (if caught) but his followers, or at least those prominent amongst them, would be executed or enslaved.²¹ Indeed, the killing of bandit leaders and their associates was something played out again and again in the *Laureolus*. In this notorious and hugely popular mime (Gaius apparently saw it on the day of his assassination) it was not unusual to have condemned men play the victims and the stage and audience were often literally awash with blood.²²

It is important at this point to note that we are dealing here with *Roman* behaviour towards royal pretenders and seditious leaders, and what we can determine of imperial policy and practice and so the example of John the Baptist is, for our purposes, irrelevant: he was not killed by the Romans but on

the orders of Herod Antipas. Even if Josephus' description of Herod Antipas' motivation in having John executed is correct, we would, in any case, be dealing with the killing of a *potential* threat and not someone who declared himself or was declared by others a king or rebel leader.²³

The determination of the Romans to destroy followers as well as those who led them, is hardly surprising, particularly given the characteristic importance of deterrence in explanations and justifications of punishment in Roman law more generally. As Quintillian observed:

Whenever we crucify criminals, the most heavily used routes are chosen where the greatest number of people can watch and be influenced by this threat; for every penalty is aimed not so much at the offence as at its exemplary value. (Quintillian, *Decl.* 274.13)²⁴

The notion that the Roman authorities would kill a royal pretender but *not* bother to persecute those who publicly supported him as a warning to others, seems to go against what we can discern of both the general practice and principles of Roman rule.

All of this really should in fact make us question whether the Romans executed Jesus because they took the kingly claims made by him, or about him, seriously. Yet, as we have stated, this is exactly what most New Testament scholars seem to argue. For example, N. T. Wright maintains that "Jesus was executed as a rebel against Rome",²⁵ James Dunn states "Jesus was executed as a threat (messianic pretender) to Rome's hold over Jerusalem",²⁶ A. E. Harvey claims "Jesus was convicted and executed on a charge of sedition against the Roman authority",²⁷ and Paula Fredriksen says that Pilate executed Jesus, "specifically as a political insurrectionist".²⁸ Of course, some raise the possibility that the Romans did not think Jesus presented *much* of a danger. As Joel Green puts it, "In its arrogance Rome may regard Jesus' ministry and message as harmless, but, in the end, it cannot

overlook the threat of civil unrest”.²⁹ Similar qualifications are indeed made by Wright,³⁰ Dunn,³¹ Fredriksen,³² and Sanders,³³ amongst others. Yet, for all this, it is important to remember that such scholars do believe that Jesus was publicly executed as some kind of threat to Roman rule, a kingly pretender of some sort. Even if, as Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn suggested, Jesus’ execution was a result of a misunderstanding of his ministry on the part of the Romans³⁴ — if they *mistook* him for a rebel leader and had him executed as such — we are still left with the problem of why they ignored his disciples?

It really will not do to try and solve the conundrum, as Sanders has suggested, by arguing that only Jesus was executed because Pilate was responding to direct pressure from some of the Jewish authorities who had a problem with Jesus alone or simply failed to convince Pilate that his followers posed a danger.³⁵ This solution would still leave us with a Roman governor apparently happy to be seen to execute someone *publicly* as a kingly pretender and also happy to be seen to leave the followers of this kingly pretender, every single one of them, for the subsequent six years during which he held this office, untroubled. For Sanders to be right, we would have to assume that Pilate did not behave, nor wish to be seen to behave, as Roman governors always seem to have behaved in such circumstances. This is all the odder given Pilate’s reputation as someone who was robust, to say the least, when it came to being seen to exert Roman authority.³⁶ If anything, we would expect Pilate to go too far the other way, and overreact to threats real or otherwise, as he eventually did with the Samaritan prophet.

So how can this conundrum be solved? I would like to suggest that there is one possible solution that is historically defensible, and makes sense within the first-century cultural context, but has yet to be considered: the Roman authorities did not believe that Jesus was a kingly pretender of any real kind. Instead, they

thought him insane. If Pilate had Jesus put to death because he believed that Jesus thought himself to be a king of some sort, but did not pursue his followers, then Pilate cannot have thought of Jesus as aspiring to be a king in any meaningful sense, publicly or privately, nor someone who could reasonably be thought a king by anyone else. The Romans executed Jesus of Nazareth because they thought they were disposing of a deluded lunatic. Not only does this solve this famous conundrum but, once the details of Jesus' treatment at the hands of the Romans are examined in the light of what we know of the treatment in Graeco-Roman culture of low-status individuals deemed insane, the solution becomes all the more compelling.

THE MADNESS OF JESUS

Of course, the accusation that Jesus was mad is hardly new. Mark's Gospel provides us with the early tradition that Jesus' own family thought him so and even went so far as to try to restrain him.³⁷ They had good reason to think as much. All the gospels contain the accusation that Jesus was possessed,³⁸ a judgement that could be taken as amounting to more or less the same thing³⁹ — although not necessarily so.⁴⁰ Indeed, John's Gospel even records a tradition that Jesus was thought to be suicidal⁴¹ — not in itself evidence of insanity but something that could be thought to indicate as much.⁴² The accusation that he was a drunkard,⁴³ even a false prophet,⁴⁴ could legitimately be seen as evidence that he was thought deranged by his contemporaries. Even the tradition that Jesus on occasion sought solitude for extended periods, as evidenced in the temptation narratives,⁴⁵ could be construed as a sign of lunacy. As Aretaeus of Cappadocia, the first-century medical writer remarked, some sufferers of mania "flee the haunts of men, and going to the wilderness, live by themselves."⁴⁶ However, what I want to argue here is not that the historical Jesus' family and some of his co-

religionists thought him mad (it seems pretty certain that they did) but that there are good grounds to suppose that the Roman authorities believed him to be insane and that this, to a significant extent, is evident in their treatment of him and can explain his death.

I venture to say anything about the death of the historical Jesus with some trepidation. It is hardly the most obscure area of New Testament research. Indeed, as we will see, some of the primary texts that will be brought into the discussion have long been known about, although their significance has been understood in a rather different manner to that argued for here. The parallels between the mocking of Jesus and that of the treatment of the unfortunate madman Carabas recounted in Philo were, for example, noted by Hugo Grotius as long ago as 1641.⁴⁷ My thesis might also appear “excessively original”,⁴⁸ in the words Ben F. Meyer has used to dismiss some recent contributions to the study of the historical Jesus — a sobering criticism, if ever there were one. I am especially wary as I do not know much about many of the things vital to my argument, although this is not entirely my fault. As Fergus Millar put it, in his seminal article on the world of Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*, “Those who study and teach the history of the ancient world suffer from a great disadvantage, which we find it difficult to admit even to ourselves; in a perfectly literal sense we do not know what we are talking about.”⁴⁹ The need for New Testament scholars to display a more thoroughgoing agnosticism on historical matters, and to eschew the infectious but misleading confidence that so often characterises our reconstructions, is something that I have pleaded for on a number of occasions elsewhere,⁵⁰ so I will not pursue it further here. Suffice to say, although I believe that what follows is plausible, and I believe sheds some new light on this most studied of subjects, I would be the first to admit that there is much that just cannot be known about these events.

A SLIGHT BUT IMPORTANT DIGRESSION: WAS JESUS ACTUALLY MAD?

Before beginning to make my case, it is important that I clarify what this paper is *not* about. It is not about whether the historical Jesus actually suffered from a mental illness of some kind in an *objective* sense. Odd though it might appear to many in the field, New Testament scholars have, from time to time, ventured to make judgements on Jesus' sanity. Indeed, no less a figure than Albert Schweitzer dedicated a book to this subject, *Die psychiatrische Beurteilung Jesu: Darstellung und Kritik*,⁵¹ motivated, in part, it seems, by his own sense of responsibility for the growth of publications in the early twentieth century that declared Jesus to be mad. As he noted, his influential work on the historical Jesus "portrayed a Jesus whose object world looked like a structure of fantasies".⁵² It seemed to him that as a result of his own writings, others believed that the: "paranoia of the Jewish Messiah had been proved".⁵³ (Schweitzer's study gave the historical Jesus a more or less clean bill of mental health.)⁵⁴

In saying that this paper is *not* about whether Jesus actually was mad, by any objective criteria (if such things exist), I would like to make it clear that I am not saying that it is illegitimate to try to investigate the psychology of the historical Jesus, something that I have argued at more length elsewhere.⁵⁵ It is customary for scholars to reject this undertaking. Günther Bornkamm, for example, judged it, "doomed to failure",⁵⁶ and contributors to the so-called "Third Quest", such as Wright, have said much the same.⁵⁷ Most are dismissive⁵⁸ because they believe that the evidence that we have is not of the kind that can sustain psychological scrutiny, and the work produced by those who have, in recent years, tried to do just this, such as John Miller⁵⁹ and Donald Capps,⁶⁰ has done little to convince them otherwise. Despite severe reservations, I do not share this pessimism. Indeed, what Peter Gay has said of historians in general is also

true of New Testament scholars: “The professional historian has always been a psychologist — an amateur psychologist.”⁶¹ For all their stated reticence, it is hard to find a scholar of the historical Jesus who has not had something to say about such things as Jesus’ “self-understanding” and has not applied assumptions about human psychology (however limited and poorly articulated) in making their judgements. An example from Sanders’ influential *Jesus and Judaism* will suffice to illustrate my point here. Although noting that the interpretation amongst Jesus’ followers of his death as atoning appears to have been “immediate and thorough”,⁶² Sanders nonetheless finds it implausible that these traditions could have originated with the historical Jesus because:

When pushed to its limit, this view means that Jesus determined in his own mind to be killed and to have his death understood as sacrificial for others, and it must then imply that he pulled this off by provoking the authorities. It is not historically impossible that Jesus was weird and I realise that my own interpretation of his views may make twentieth-century people look at him askance. But the view that he plotted his own redemptive death makes him strange in any century and thrusts the entire drama into his peculiar inner psyche. The other things that we know about him make him a *reasonable* first-century visionary. We should be guided by them.⁶³

For all of the problems, it is high time that scholars of the historical Jesus became rather less averse to psychology. At the very least it might make them more critically aware of the psychological assumptions operative in judgements such as this, which at present go largely unexamined.

MAKING SENSE OF MADNESS

It is also necessary, before we venture any further, to say something about the initial problems raised by attempting to study anything to do with madness in the ancient world. There

are at least two major difficulties that face us. Firstly, little work is being done on this subject. Although there are some fine and ostensibly comprehensive studies of Roman medicine, such as those by Jacques André,⁶⁴ Audrey Cruse,⁶⁵ Ralph Jackson,⁶⁶ and Vivian Nutton,⁶⁷ and a range of excellent works on the history of diseases in antiquity, notably that of Mirko Grmek,⁶⁸ these authors make virtually no reference to mental disorders. Studies of perceptions of disease and illness in antiquity, such as Geoffrey Lloyd's monograph on the subject,⁶⁹ and interpretations of deformity and disability in Graeco-Roman culture, such as that by Robert Garland,⁷⁰ have little of relevance to say, either directly or indirectly. To date, what work there has been on this issue has been rather limited in its focus (for our purposes) and has concentrated on either literary concerns, such as Deborah Hershkowitz's examination of the role of madness in epic,⁷¹ or the study of women in antiquity, such as Mary Lefkowitz and Maureen Fant,⁷² and Rebecca Flemming⁷³ (who have made much of the gendered notions of rationality evident in the assumptions of Graeco-Roman medical writers). There have been some studies of specific works of Greek and Roman medical authors that appear to touch directly on this subject, such as the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease*, a book that contests the divine origin of an illness that seems to resemble what we would call epilepsy,⁷⁴ but these do not reveal much of relevance for us. There has been no concerted and comprehensive attempt to study insanity in antiquity.⁷⁵ This is an unusual *lacuna* in scholarship,⁷⁶ particularly given Michel Foucault's influential history of madness, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*.⁷⁷ Indeed, given the significant effect his *Histoire de la sexualité*⁷⁸ has had upon the direction of subsequent scholarship in Classics,⁷⁹ this is all the more surprising. The most comprehensive treatment of madness in the ancient world remains the early sections of Fred Rosen's *Madness in Society*:

*Chapters in the Historical Sociology of Mental Illness*⁸⁰ which is now almost forty years old and has evident weaknesses. Although there are probably many reasons for this state of affairs, such as the fact that most mental disorders leave no direct mark on the skeletal record,⁸¹ one hopes we will not have to wait too long for this to be rectified.

A second difficulty that faces us is that the phenomenon of mental illness is a difficult thing to discuss in any period or culture. Those deemed “mad” in our primary sources display a wide variety of behavioural abnormalities. A multiplicity of technical terms were also employed and these often seem to overlap with each other, and it is clear that those using them often had very different notions about what might be being discussed. The term μανία was regularly used in Greek sources of our period, and although it was generally distinguished from φρενίτις (a mental disturbance usually accompanied by a fever) and ἐπιληψία (erratic behaviour caused by some form of seizure), it was a catch-all term that could include a vast range of different problems that, at least from the lay perspective, were somehow all related.⁸² In Lucian’s *Abdicatus*, for example, the doctor son who has been disowned by his father for refusing to treat his stepmother (whom he judges to be beyond medical help) complains:

My father expects all attacks of insanity (μανία) in all bodies to be alike and their treatment the same. [...] Madness (μανία) itself has a thousand forms, numberless causes, and even some distinct names. Delusion (παρανοεῖν), eccentricity (παρὰπαίειν), frenzy (λυτᾶν), and lunacy (μεμηνέναι) are not the same thing, but are all names that signify whether one is more or less in the grip of the disease. (*Abdic.* 27, 30)

But we too find it hard to talk about insanity with any precision. Terms such as “mad” or “mentally ill” in English are used to refer to a massive range of human experiences and behaviours, from

mild depression to paranoid schizophrenia. It is unsurprising because, as Roy Porter notes, “even today we possess no rational consensus upon the nature of mental illness — what it is, what causes it, what will cure it.”⁸³ Just as it is notoriously hard to define “health”,⁸⁴ it is a maddeningly elusive thing to define “insanity”. Indeed, The American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*, perhaps the most influential reference work on the classification of mental disorders, and used regularly in clinical contexts, begins, somewhat unnervingly, by noting: “Although this manual provides a classification of mental disorders, it must be admitted that no definition adequately specifies precise boundaries for the concept of ‘mental disorder’.”⁸⁵

This difficulty in talking about insanity, is, in part, a consequence of madness being culturally constructed. Wherever one places oneself in current debates about the fundamental nature of human ill health, and the relationship between the physical experience of disease and the social experience of illness, it is fair to assume that most would agree that to suffer from a mental disorder is also not quite the same thing as suffering from a fracture. Although all ailments are, to some degree, culturally, as well biologically, determined (that is, it is one thing to have Hansen’s disease and to experience the gradual destruction of your nervous system that it causes, it is quite another to suffer the social death that is the illness of leprosy), “madness” seems especially so. As Rosen puts it:

Whether or not a person is considered mentally ill depends on the degree to which his [sic] behaviour is disturbed, and the attitude of the members of his social group towards deviant behaviour. In this sense mental disorder is perhaps even more intimately dependent on social factors than is physical illness.⁸⁶

We really cannot underestimate the significance of human culture in perceptions and experiences of mental illness.⁸⁷ To

put it crudely, culture determines what symptoms are taken as indicative of mental illness, what label is given to a sufferer, and how such an illness is explained and treated by other members of society. Culture determines what actions or beliefs are regarded as deviant, and whether these are labelled mad or bad, or of no particular interest one way or the other. Even the content of madness is, in some sense culturally shaped. When a condition has a clearly organic basis, such as neurosyphilis, delirium tremens, cerebral malaria, or dementia, the sufferer's "perceptions and behaviour, the content of their hallucinations or delusions, and the attitudes of others towards them"⁸⁸ are shaped by cultural factors. As Porter insightfully remarks, "Even the mad are men [or women] of their times."⁸⁹ The degree to which most critics would confirm that madness is culturally constructed, more so than other forms of illness, means that it is something that can be contested between cultures. As Ruth Benedict long ago observed, behaviour that could be considered abnormal, a sign of neurosis or psychosis in one culture, might be highly valued or acceptable in another.⁹⁰

The culturally constructed nature of madness is evident in its uses. Because of the peculiar malleability of the idea of "madness" in society, and the fact that it is often a label for deviance, it is especially vulnerable to reflecting and enforcing the dominant ideas and relationships of power. Accusations of "madness", like those of "badness" or "magic", can function as ideological means of control — intentionally or unintentionally. For example, when it was proposed in 1864 to admit women to London University degrees, one opponent went on record to say, in all seriousness, that "fears have been expressed that if girls were encouraged to use their brains, the excitement caused thereby might produce insanity".⁹¹ The recognition that accusations of madness can have a clear ideological function has been carried to its logical conclusion by proponents of the Anti-Psychiatry Movement

who argue that much of mental illness is simply a social construction, a euphemism for behaviours that are disapproved of, created by psychiatrists who act as powerful agents of social control — the kind of analysis found, for example, in the controversial work of Thomas Szasz.⁹²

Given this, it is no surprise that “in practice, the dividing line between sanity and insanity is not always easily established”.⁹³ For example, Josephus was not sure if the behaviour of the Sicarii under torture, in refusing to admit that Caesar was their Lord, should be called courage or madness (ἀπόνουα).⁹⁴ Similarly, it was not clear whether the peripatetic doctor Menecrates, who claimed to be divine, called himself Zeus, and dressed up as the god, was mad or not. According to Athenaeus, Menecrates used his skill in medicine:

To compel those whom he cured of the so-called sacred diseases to sign a bond that they would obey him as his slaves if they were restored to health. And one man who became his attendant wore the dress and went by the name of Heracles ... Another attendant with the riding-cloak and herald's staff and wings besides, was called Hermes ... another Apollo ... Still another of his patients who had been restored to health moved about in his company clad in the garb of Asclepius. As for Zeus himself, dressed in purple, with a gold crown on his head and carrying a sceptre, his feet shod with slippers, he walked about attended by his divine choir. (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 7.33–34)⁹⁵

Menecrates' opinions were quoted in medical texts of the period, despite the fact that at least one recipient of his unsolicited letters responded to his demand that he be recognised as Zeus by advising him to take a dose of hellebore (a plant noted as effective in the treatment of the insane). As Rosen notes, “an individual who believed himself to be a god incarnate did not stand out quite as sharply in society or appear quite as alien as he would today.”⁹⁶

PERCEPTIONS AND RESPONSES TO MADNESS

Having briefly sketched the problems that face anyone trying to understand madness in antiquity, we can now turn back to the first century. Before looking more directly at the details of Jesus' treatment by the Romans, it is necessary to examine the range of understandings and responses to madness within first-century Graeco-Roman cultures,⁹⁷ and more specifically the culture of Pilate, a minor aristocrat of equestrian rank,⁹⁸ probably from Italy, and the cultures of those involved directly in the crucifixion of Jesus — the Syrio-Palestinian auxiliaries.⁹⁹ Literary and theatrical depictions were probably influential in shaping and reflecting the assumptions of both, albeit in somewhat different ways. From what we know of the continued popularity of his writings across the empire in our period, Homer's depictions of the mad can tell us much about the perceptions of many of its inhabitants.¹⁰⁰ For Homer, mental states in humans have their origins outside of a person and mental disturbances come from the gods themselves (although characters can have internal conflicts they are generally between one impulse and another, or one part of the body and another, and are not the cause of insanity). Homer's Bellerophon became the classic example of just such an afflicted individual — wandering alone, persecuted and driven insane by the gods.¹⁰¹ Likewise, Ajax's temporary madness in Sophocles' play of that name¹⁰² and that of Heracles, in Euripides' play the *Madness of Heracles*,¹⁰³ or the worshippers of Dionysus in his work *The Bacchae*,¹⁰⁴ were probably influential, as were the depictions found in popular Roman New Comedy, such as Plautus' *Menaechmi*. These present a similar notion of madness as that of Homer (although we begin to see an interest in organic and naturalistic explanations of mental illness, where imbalances in humours, and circumstances rather than gods or their intermediaries, drive people mad).¹⁰⁵ These depictions were well known, not just through the presentation

of these plays in antiquity but also, from what we can tell, of the popularised and bowdlerised versions of them that seem to have been common in mime (which was not mute but a kind of knockabout slapstick and was by far the most dominant theatrical form in the first-century eastern Roman empire). In mime, the physical abuse of the μωρός (fool) is a recurring and prominent motif.¹⁰⁶

However, the most extensive discussions of mental illness are, of course, to be found in medical writers of the period. The popular currency of such medical ideas is difficult to determine and the undifferentiated understanding of μανία displayed by the father in Lucian's *Abdicatus* probably typified the thinking of most people. Nonetheless, some writers such as Aulus Cornelius Celsus did present medical ideas to a wider, educated audience through the popular genre of the encyclopedia, and their writings may well tell us something relevant about perceptions and treatments of those deemed mentally ill by a man such as Pilate.¹⁰⁷ Celsus, for example, declares that true madness has a discernible onset and is delusional:

Insanity is really there when a continuous dementia begins, when the patient, although up till then in his senses, yet entertains certain vain imaginings; the insanity becomes established when the mind becomes at the mercy of such imaginings. (Celsus, *De medicina* 3.18.3)

He also tells us something about the range of forms of mental impairment and notes how even those who appear sane are *really* mad if their actions indicate as much:

There are several sorts of insanity; for some among insane persons are sad, others hilarious; some are more readily controlled and rave in words only, others are rebellious and act with violence; and of these latter, some only do harm by impulse, others are artful too, and show the most complete appearance of sanity while seizing

occasion for mischief, but they are detected by the result of their acts. (Celsus, *Med.* 3.18.3)

Celsus gives us an indication of the diversity of common practices amongst those who wished to try to restore the insane to rational life and had sufficient resources for such an undertaking. Although some treatments were humane, involving dietetics,¹⁰⁸ blood-letting,¹⁰⁹ drugs,¹¹⁰ and even interventions that resemble some contemporary psychotherapeutic practices,¹¹¹ and others, such as incubation in temples¹¹² and exorcism,¹¹³ and the use of incantations and amulets,¹¹⁴ probably did no harm to sufferers, some common interventions were extremely physically and psychologically distressing. As Celsus notes, “If it is the mind that deceives the madman, he is best treated by certain tortures”.¹¹⁵ It was, for example, common practice to bind the mentally ill:

Those who conduct themselves more violently it is expedient to fetter, lest they should do harm either to themselves or to others. Anyone so fettered, although he talks rationally and pitifully when he wants his fetters removed, is not to be trusted, for that is a madman’s trick. (Celsus, *Med.* 3.18.4)¹¹⁶

Such practices are referred to by Paul of Aegina and numerous others.¹¹⁷ It was also common to assume that violence could bring some people back to their senses. Just as Heracles had been restored to his right mind by Athena throwing a “sanity stone” at him,¹¹⁸ those judged to be suffering from delusions were particularly prone to such treatment and were often beaten to restore them to their senses. As Celsus remarks:

If, however, it is the mind that deceives the madman, he is best treated by certain tortures. When he says or does anything wrong, he is to be coerced by starvation, fetters and flogging ... To be terrified suddenly and to be thoroughly frightened is beneficial in this illness and so, in general, is anything which strongly agitates the spirit. (Celsus, *Med.* 3.18.21–22)

Starvation was also a regular weapon in the therapeutic armoury for those who refused to respond to treatment.¹¹⁹ Those deemed mad ran the serious risk of being killed by the therapy itself.

Of course, most of those suffering from *μανία* did not receive medical treatment at all,¹²⁰ and our knowledge of their fate comes to us only indirectly. From what we can determine, the best most could hope for would be confinement by their families, who had primary responsibility for them (as in the case of Jesus and his family according to Mark).¹²¹ However, to judge from the ubiquity of the insane in literary evidence of the time, it seems many were abandoned and left to fend for themselves,¹²² wandering about,¹²³ vulnerable to assault; “in antiquity, the mentally disordered became objects of ridicule, scorn or abuse, and remained public butts for the amusement of the populace”.¹²⁴ They were “teased, chased, pelted with clods or subjected to other indignities”.¹²⁵ The mentally ill seem to have feared the regular, random violence of the wider population.¹²⁶ It was customary to spit on the mad¹²⁷ and to throw stones at them (probably for apotropaic reasons). One of the *advocati* in Plautus’ *Poenulus*, for example, refused to run through the streets for fear that he would be thought mad and that people would do exactly that.¹²⁸ Children and youths seem to have been both the deranged’s closest associates and their most persistent persecutors.¹²⁹ There is some evidence that within some cultures of the Roman empire, the mentally ill even functioned as ritual “scapegoats”, as *pharmakoi* — although we should not make too much of such accounts as they are disparate and probably unrepresentative in their nature.¹³⁰ But, nonetheless, we should not ignore the evidence that those deemed mad were thought to be of no value in the sight of others, and, along with others in this category (such as the indigent and the elderly) were often assumed to be disposable and could be killed or left to die.¹³¹

Indeed, it was recommended by some that they should be systematically slaughtered.¹³²

TWO CASES OF “MADNESS”: CARABAS AND JESUS BEN ANANIAS

However, before we return to the historical Jesus, I would like to focus on the two fullest accounts of the treatment of those deemed mad in the ancient world: the account of Carabas in Philo¹³³ and that of Jesus ben Ananias in Josephus.¹³⁴ Both tell us much about the treatment of the insane in the early empire. Despite their familiarity to some, I think it is important to include the relevant sections of the accounts in their entirety.

According to Philo, during the reign of Caligula, the pagan populace of Alexandria, stirred by antisemitic feelings at the visit of Agrippa, decided to insult him by dressing up a madman Carabas as a mock king:

(36) Ἦν τις μεμηνὼς ὄνομα Καραβᾶς οὐ τὴν ἀγρίαν καὶ θηριώδη μανίαν—ἄσκηπτος γὰρ αὕτη γε καὶ τοῖς ἔχουσι καὶ τοῖς πλησιάζουσιν—, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀνειμένην καὶ μαλακωτέραν. οὗτος διημέρευε καὶ διενυκτέρευε γυμνὸς ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς οὔτε θάλλος οὔτε κρυμὸν ἐκτρεπόμενος, ἄθυρμα (37) νηπίων καὶ μειρακίων σχολαζόντων. συνελάσαντες τὸν ἄθλιον ἄχρι τοῦ γυμνασίου καὶ στήσαντες μετέωρον, ἵνα καθορῶτο πρὸς πάντων, βύβλον μὲν εὐρύναντες ἀντὶ διαδήματος ἐπιθέασιν αὐτοῦ τῇ κεφαλῇ, χαμαιστρώτῳ δὲ τὸ ἄλλο σῶμα περιβάλλουσιν ἀντὶ χλαμύδος, ἀντὶ δὲ σκήπτρου βραχύ τι παπύρου τμήμα τῆς ἐγχωρίου καθ’ ὁδὸν ἐρριμμένον ἰδὼν (38) τις ἀναδίδωσιν. ἐπεὶ δὲ ὡς ἐν θεατρικοῖς μίμοις τὰ παρὰ σῆμα τῆς βασιλείας ἀνείληφει καὶ διεκεκόσμητο εἰς βασιλέα, νεανίαὶ ῥάβδους ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων φέροντες ἀντὶ λογχοφόρων ἐκατέρωθεν εἰστήκεσαν μμούμενοι δορυφόρους. εἶθ’ ἕτεροι προσήεσαν, οἱ μὲν ὡς ἀσπασόμενοι, οἱ δὲ ὡς (39) δικασόμενοι, οἱ δ’ ὡς ἐντευξόμενοι περὶ κοινῶν πραγμάτων. εἴτ’ ἐκ τοῦ περιεστώτος ἐν κύκλῳ πλήθους ἐξήχει βοή τις ἄτοπος Μάριν ἀποκαλούντων — οὔτως δὲ φασὶ τὸν κύριον ὀνομάζεσθαι παρὰ Σύροις.

(36) There was a certain lunatic named Carabas, whose madness

was not of the fierce and savage kind, which is dangerous both to the madmen themselves and those who approach them, but of the easy-going, gentler sort. He spent day and night in the streets naked, shunning neither heat nor cold, made game of by children and the lads who were idling about. (37) The rioters drove the poor fellow into the gymnasium and set him up on high to be seen of all and put on his head a sheet of byblus spread out wide for a diadem, clothed the rest of his body with a rug for a royal robe, while someone who had noticed a piece of the native papyrus thrown away in the road gave it to him for his sceptre. (38) And when as in some theatrical farce he had received the insignia of kingship and had been tricked out as a king, young men carrying rods on their shoulders as spearmen stood on either side of him in imitation of a bodyguard. Then others approached him, some pretending to salute him, others to sue for justice, others to consult on state affairs. (39) Then from the multitudes standing round him there rang out a tremendous shout hailing him as “Marin”, which is said to be the name for “lord” in Syria. (Philo, *Flaccus* 6.36–39)

The similarities between the treatment of Carabas and Jesus of Nazareth are obvious on even a cursory read. Indeed, W. D. Davies and Dale Allison¹³⁵ cite it as the closest parallel that we have in literature of the period to the mocking of Jesus. Some have argued that Philo’s account might well have directly affected that of Mark, and others have maintained its direct influence on Matthew’s redaction of the event (he adds the detail that Jesus is given a *κάλαμος* as a mock sceptre¹³⁶ while Carabas is similarly given a piece of *πάπυρος* to serve the same purpose). John Dominic Crossan even goes so far as to suggest that Carabas’ mocking is in part responsible for the creation of the tradition that Jesus was mocked, saying, “suppose, now, that somebody with magnificent imagination took an exegesis such as that in the Epistle of Barnabas 7 and a story such that in *Against Flaccus* 32–39 and put them together.”¹³⁷

However, for all the interest the parallels between the mocking of Carabas and Jesus have generated since Grotius, the fact that

Carabas is described as suffering from *μανία* is rarely considered of any consequence. Indeed, in Paul Winter's otherwise informative discussion of the possible relationship of the Carabas episode to the traditions of the mocking of Jesus, he rather oddly refers to Carabas as a "lout".¹³⁸ This is a peculiarly inappropriate way of talking about the character as Philo has presented him. Here we have a "madman", of what Philo calls the "gentle kind", mocked as a king (albeit, if Philo is correct, as a way of mocking someone else — Agrippa, or indeed, the Jews of Alexandria as a whole). Surely it is far from insignificant that the event with the closest parallels to the mocking of Jesus involves the mocking of *someone believed to be insane*.

The story of Jesus ben Ananias is well known to New Testament scholars. He is often cited as an example of a category of oracular or popular prophet with strong parallels to the historical Jesus both in his message and treatment, and, like Jesus, is a peasant from the countryside, who appeared in Jerusalem only for trouble to ensue.

(300) τὸ δὲ τούτων φοβερώτερον, Ἰησοῦς γάρ τις υἱὸς Ἀνανίουτῶν ιδιωτῶν ἀγροικὸς πρὸ τεσσάρων ἐτῶν τοῦ πολέμου τὰ μάλιστα τῆς πόλεως εἰρηνευομένης καὶ εὐθηνούσης, ἐλθὼν εἰς τὴν ἑορτήν, ἐν ᾗ σκηνοποιεῖσθαι πάντας ἔθος τῷ θεῷ, κατὰ τὸ ἱερὸν (301) ἐξαπίνης ἀναβοᾶν ἤρξατο „φωνὴ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς, φωνὴ ἀπὸ δύσεως, φωνὴ ἀπὸ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων, φωνὴ ἐπὶ Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ τὸν ναόν, φωνὴ ἐπὶ νυμφίους καὶ νύμφας, φωνὴ ἐπὶ τὸν λαὸν πάντα.“ τοῦτο μεθ' ἡμέραν καὶ νύκτωρ κατὰ πάντας τοὺς στενωποὺς περιήει (302) κεκραγώς. τῶν δὲ ἐπισήμων τινὲς δημοτῶν ἀγανακτήσαντες πρὸς τὸ κακόφημον συλλαμβάνουσι τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ πολλαῖς αἰκίζονται πληγαῖς. ὁ δὲ οὐθ' ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ φθεγξάμενος οὔτε ἰδίᾳ (303) πρὸς τοὺς παῖοντας, ἃς καὶ πρότερον φωνὰς βοῶν διετέλει. νομίσαντες δὲ οἱ ἄρχοντες, ὅπερ ἦν, δαιμονιώτερον τὸ κίνημα τάνδρως (304) ἀνάγουσιν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸν παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις ἔπαρχον. ἔνθα μάλιστα μέχρι ὁστέων ξαινόμενος οὐθ' ἰκέτευσεν οὐτ' ἐδάκρυσεν, ἀλλ' ὥς ἐνήν μάλιστα τὴν φωνὴν ὀλοφυρτικῶς παρεγκλίνων πρὸς ἐκάστην (305) ἀπεκρίνατο πληγὴν “αἰαὶ Ἱεροσολύμοις.” τοῦ δ' Ἀλβίνου διερωτῶντος, οὗτος γὰρ ἔπαρχος ἦν, τίς εἶη καὶ πόθεν, καὶ διὰ τί ταῦτα φθέγγοιτο, πρὸς ταῦτα

μὲν οὐδ' ὅτι οὖν ἀπεκρίνατο, τὸν δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ πόλει θρήνον εἶρων οὐ διέλειπεν, μέχρι καταγνοῦς μανίαν ὁ (306) Ἀλβίνος ἀπέλυσεν αὐτόν.

(300) But a further portent was even more alarming. Four years before the war, when the city was enjoying profound peace and prosperity, there came to the feast at which it is the custom of all Jews to erect tabernacles to God (301), one Jesus, son of Ananias, a rude peasant who, standing in the temple, suddenly began to cry out, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds; a voice against Jerusalem and the sanctuary, a voice against the bridegroom and the bride, a voice against all the people." Day and night he went about (303) all the alleys with this cry on his lips. Some of the leading citizens, incensed at these ill-omened words, arrested the fellow and severely chastised him.(304) But he, without a word on his own behalf or for the private ear of those who smote him, only continued his cries as before. Thereupon, the magistrates, supposing, as was indeed the case, that the man was under some supernatural impulse, brought him before the Roman governor; there, although flayed to the bone with scourges, he neither sued for mercy nor shed a tear, but merely introducing the most mournful of variations into his ejaculation, responded to each stroke with "Woe to Jerusalem!" (305) When Albinus, the governor, asked him who and whence he was and why he uttered these cries, he answered him never a word, but unceasingly reiterated his dirge over the city, until (306) Albinus pronounced him a maniac and let him go. (Josephus, *Bellum judaicum* 6.300–305)

Again, even a superficial reading reveals that the parallels between the treatment of Jesus ben Ananias and Jesus of Nazareth are extremely close. So close that some have felt it necessary to demonstrate that there is no direct literary relationship between Josephus' account and the accounts of the evangelists.¹³⁹ Craig Evans has usefully summarised these striking similarities:

Both entered the precincts of the Temple (Mark 11:11, 15, 27, 12:35, 13:1, 14:49; *J.W.* 6.5.3 §301) at the time of a religious festival (Mark 14:2, 15:6, John 2:23; *J.W.* 6.5.3 §300). Both spoke of the doom of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–22, 21:20–24; *J.W.* 6.5.3 §301), the Sanctuary

(Mark 13:2, 14:58; *J.W.* 6.5.3 §301), and the people (Mark 13:17; Luke 19:44; 23:28-31; *J.W.* 6.5.3 §301). Both apparently alluded to Jeremiah 7, where the prophet condemned the Temple establishment of his day (“cave of robbers”: Jer 7:11 in Mark 11:17; “the voice against the bridegroom and the bride”; Jer 7:34 in *J.W.* 6.5.3 §301). Both were “arrested” by the authority of the Jewish — not the Roman — leaders (Mark 14:48; John 18:12; *J.W.* 6.5.3. §302). Both were beaten by the Jewish authorities (Matt 26:68; Mark 14:65; *J.W.* 6.5.3 §302). Both were handed over to the Roman governor (Luke 23:1; *J.W.* 6.5.3 §303). Both were interrogated by the Roman governor (Mark 15:4; *J.W.* 6.5.3 §305). Both were scourged by the governor (John 19:1; *J.W.* 6.5.3 §304). Governor Pilate may have offered to release Jesus of Nazareth, but did not; Governor Albinus did release Jesus son of Ananias (Mark 15:9; *J.W.* 6.5.3 §306).¹⁴⁰

The fact that Jesus ben Ananias was handed over to the Romans by some of the leaders amongst Jews in Jerusalem has been recognised as a particularly significant detail by many commentators. As Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz remark:

By all accounts the Jerusalem local authority was involved in the trial of Jesus as a kind of first instance, whereas Pilate was responsible for the execution in the last instance. We find an analogy to this series of “instances” in the proceedings against Jesus son of Ananias, the prophet of disaster, which are reported by Josephus.¹⁴¹

In many such ways the story of Jesus ben Ananias makes that of Jesus of Nazareth, as presented in gospels, somewhat more historically plausible.

However, despite all these significant parallels, once again nothing has been made of Jesus ben Ananias being judged “insane” by Albinus. This is all the stranger when we note that the reasons Albinus’ judgement surely have resonances for anyone familiar with the story of Jesus of Nazareth. According to Josephus, ben Ananias displayed behaviour typical of the “mad” when he appeared before the governor: he showed no regard

either for his own life (failing to ask for mercy nor complaining “despite being flayed the bone”) or for those around him (he failed to answer Albinus’ questions, merely repeating his oracle, not saying who he was, or where he was from or why he was making this pronouncement).¹⁴²

Of course, the obvious difference in their fates might be one of the reasons that the madness of Jesus ben Ananias has been thought of no consequence in understanding the historical Jesus: Jesus ben Ananias was released, not exactly unharmed (it was something of a miracle that he recovered from his wounds) but alive. However, from the perspective of a Roman such as Pilate, the behaviour of Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus ben Ananias differed markedly and so it is unsurprising that the treatment meted out to them did so too. Jesus’ behaviour in the temple would have indicated that Jesus was not just mad but one of those “madmen” who suffered from the most severe and problematic forms of mania. Jesus did not just declaim against the temple, as did ben Ananias, but also seems to have been involved in some kind of physical action within it¹⁴³ — something that has often been thought the proximate cause of his demise.¹⁴⁴ It is not relevant, for our purposes, to speculate about what Jesus himself may have intended by his actions, but it is fair to say that it did involve some force on his part but not, according to all the accounts we possess,¹⁴⁵ on the part of his followers. From a Roman point of view, Jesus’ actions in the temple would be most easily understood as the anti-social, erratic ragings of a particular kind of lone “madman”, the kind that is not released, unfettered (as was the case with ben Ananias) to roam the streets, but who had to be dealt with. Even if Jesus had not displayed such aggression before, which is not necessarily the case, he could easily fall into this category and be judged one of those who despite “showing the most complete appearance of sanity whilst seizing occasion for mischief ... are detected by the result of

their acts”.¹⁴⁶ The belief that Jesus was just such a “madman” was probably already in circulation during his ministry, and it is always possible that this reputation preceded him. The tradition in Mark 3.19b–21 is hardly one that the early church would have invented and, for our purposes, it is important to note that it tells us that his family sought to restrain him, a sign that his mania was considered particularly severe. Indeed, perhaps, as Sanders speculates, this tradition might be “a remnant of a once larger body of material that depicted Jesus as engaging in erratic behaviour.”¹⁴⁷ Jesus’ age might also have encouraged such a judgement by Pilate. According to Caelius Aurelianus “mania occurs most frequently in young and middle-aged men, rarely in old men, and most infrequently in children and women.”¹⁴⁸ In addition, Jesus did not show signs of the dissociative euphoria associated with the “gentler” kind of madness, and so he is more likely to have been thought more seriously disturbed.¹⁴⁹

JUDGING JESUS MAD: CONCLUDING REMARKS

We began this paper by demonstrating that a conundrum that lies at the heart of our understanding of the fate of the historical Jesus has yet to be satisfactorily solved: why was Jesus of Nazareth put to death by the Roman authorities, but his followers left untroubled by them? Following our preceding analysis of perceptions and responses to insanity in first-century culture, we are now in a better place to examine the plausibility of our contention that the conundrum can be resolved by assuming that the Romans thought Jesus of Nazareth to be a deranged and deluded lunatic.

From Pilate’s perspective, Jesus would have demonstrated the symptoms of a madman by his behaviour. Not only might his actions in the temple have indicated this but from what we can determine, during their audience, Jesus behaved in a perplexing and abnormal fashion. The earliest account of Jesus’ appearance

before the Roman governor presents him as someone who answers Pilate's initial, customary question about his identity in a terse and oblique manner before refusing to make any further response to the accusations made against him, despite being reminded of the importance of the charges.¹⁵⁰ Even though the Johannine Jesus is rather more forthcoming, as he so often is, the conversation is hardly enlightening from Pilate's perspective and presents another tradition of Jesus as obstinate and abstruse in his communication with the governor. Indeed, in the gospels Jesus displays a lack of concern for his own fate that typified those thought insane in literature of the day. As Horace observed, "The mad have no interest in their fate, they do not wish to be saved ... who saves a man against his will does the same as murder him."¹⁵¹

The content of claims made by Jesus or about him, whilst probably understandable within a first-century Jewish context to at least some Jews, would have seemed somewhat odd, to say the least, to a Roman official. If, as seems likely, the historical Jesus did proclaim something about the arrival of the kingdom of God¹⁵² and believed himself¹⁵³ and the Twelve¹⁵⁴ to have some part in it, but did not think of himself as somehow establishing this by force of arms, it would be perfectly reasonable for Pilate to assume that he was, in some sense, delusional. The fact that he probably maintained that this "kingdom" was already present,¹⁵⁵ despite the lack of material evidence, would surely have reinforced this diagnosis. From a Roman point of view would Jesus of Nazareth really appear much different from cases of delusion typical of common forms of mania? From people who believed themselves to be Atlas, bearing the world on their shoulders or some other god?¹⁵⁶ Or those that thought themselves to be famous actors, orators, animals, or even inanimate objects?¹⁵⁷ It is difficult to see how Jesus of Nazareth would appear much different from, say, Thrasyllus, an Athenian

who was under the delusion that every ship entering and leaving Piraeus belonged to him;¹⁵⁸ or the inhabitant of Argos who believed himself to be applauding great tragic actors while seated alone in an empty theatre;¹⁵⁹ or Menecrates, whose facility at healing led him to think he was Zeus;¹⁶⁰ or even the man who thought himself a stalk of grain and asserted that he occupied the centre of the universe;¹⁶¹ or the woman who believed that the fate of the universe hung on whether she were to bend her little finger.¹⁶²

The likelihood that Jesus was perceived to be insane is also indicated in the details of his execution. Although the mocking of Jesus as a king might well have come naturally to the auxiliaries if they knew about the specific kingly claims made by or about Jesus,¹⁶³ we should not overlook the possibility that their preoccupation with Jesus' kingship might come directly from the fact that kingship was often closely associated with the insane — that association could be reason enough to explain the form that the mockery took. We have already noted that the closest parallels to the mocking of Jesus¹⁶⁴ are found in the treatment of the "madman" Carabas who was, of course, arrayed as a king.¹⁶⁵ Most "temporary kings" in antiquity, such as the unfortunate Carabas, or those given this role in the Saturnalia, were thought insane or expected to act the part of the madman, turning the world upside down,¹⁶⁶ and the "mad" were particularly associated with crowns in the first century. The medical writer Aretaeus, for example, refers to the behaviour of the mad who: "go openly to the market crowned, as if victors in some contest of skill."¹⁶⁷ Although a polysemous symbol, the crown in the first-century world could carry something of the symbolic resonances of the dunce's hat in Victorian England, and was part of the cultural construction of insanity. Indeed, the crucifixion of two "brigands" beside Jesus may well have been a deliberate attempt to evoke a macabre royal retinue, something reminiscent of the

mock guards on either side of Carabas during his pretend enthronement,¹⁶⁸ and the *titulus* itself might not be intended to tell onlookers of Jesus' crime of sedition but rather to function as a comic graffito, a shorthand way of conveying the idea that the man on the cross was self-evidently delusional.¹⁶⁹ Other aspects of his treatment, such as his being spat upon,¹⁷⁰ whilst not something only meted out to the mad, was, as we have seen, a characteristic of their experience. Similarly, scourging,¹⁷¹ while often part of the penalty of crucifixion,¹⁷² was also something particularly associated with the insane, as we have seen in the case of ben Ananias and elsewhere.¹⁷³ The wine that Jesus was given on the cross¹⁷⁴ could also be thought of as a cure for madness, a way of bringing one to one's senses — possibly a final humiliation.¹⁷⁵

Of course, objections could be raised to the case that has been made. It might be argued, for example, that from our sources it seems that Jesus of Nazareth behaved in a manner that would appear rational to those about him and distinguish him from Carabas and Jesus ben Ananias. In our accounts, he does not display the kind of abnormal behaviour that, to many modern readers, would mark these two individuals out as suffering from some kind of severe mental impairment. However, it is important to emphasise that insanity was thought to include a spectrum of behaviours and some considered quite "mad" were believed to be more than capable of rational action most of the time (as, for example, we can see in the case of Theonastus, who caused Cicero such problems).¹⁷⁶ Indeed, it is important to recall that it was those capable of showing the "most complete appearance of sanity" that Celsus thought should be dealt with most severely,¹⁷⁷ and that Jesus' action in the temple might well indicate to some that he had the capacity for dangerous outbursts that characterised the dangerously insane.

It could also be objected that none of the later critics of

Christianity believed Jesus of Nazareth to be insane and instead later polemics seem to focus upon the accusation that Jesus was a magician or charlatan of some kind.¹⁷⁸ However, later polemics do not tell us much of value about the historical Jesus or the events surrounding his death and seem to reflect the kerygma of the church, which gave a prominent place to his miraculous activity.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, despite its subsequent popularity, the accusation that Jesus was a magician is relatively late and not *directly* present in the earliest records at all.¹⁸⁰ The tradition that Jesus was believed to be mad in Mark 3.19b-21 has as great a claim, if not greater, to antiquity. In addition, the allegation that Jesus was mad or, at the very least, extremely stupid, is not actually absent from anti-Christian polemics of later years.¹⁸¹

Finally, it may be objected that although I have made a case for the possibility that Jesus was perceived by the Romans to be a “madman”, we are no closer to knowing *why* he was put to death. It is customary to assume that a significant event *must* have a significant cause,¹⁸² but the death of Jesus was only significant in retrospect, and it might well not have been the consequence of anything much (the temple incident might well be enough, or Jesus’ insolence during the audience with Pilate). Jesus’ execution was hardly worth a second thought by Pilate, and in all likelihood, given what we know of Pilate’s reputation, and the value placed on the insane in antiquity,¹⁸³ probably not even that. As we said at the outset of this piece, we may never know *why* Jesus died, but we can say that if he were thought a dangerous, deluded madman, his death is all the more unsurprising.

To solve the conundrum with which we started, we needed to discover a historical Jesus who was not just “crucifiable”, as Dunn maintains,¹⁸⁴ but one who *alone* was “crucifiable”, something that is actually much harder to explain than has hitherto been recognised. Given their failure to pursue his followers, it will not

do to argue that Jesus was put to death by the Romans because they took the kingly claims made by or about him seriously in any way at all. We may not be able to say *why* Jesus was killed, but we can rule this explanation out. However, if Jesus of Nazareth was believed by Pilate and his troops to be a worthless, dangerous, and disruptive madman, as I have maintained here, we would have found a Jesus that would fit the bill — only he, and not his followers, would have been killed. If this Jesus is not one that resembles the historical Jesus' own self-understanding, or the Jesus proclaimed by his followers, that is to be expected and supports rather than undermines the plausibility of this thesis. For ultimately power and madness are inextricably linked and the gulf between the visions of the world held by those labelled "mad", and who suffer the consequences, and those who successfully label others mad, is unbridgeable. Although the historical Jesus probably would not have called for his enemies' damnation,¹⁸⁵ as with Nathaniel Lee, so with Jesus of Nazareth: "They called me mad, and I called them mad, and damn them, they out voted me."

Notes

1. Nathaniel Lee was a seventeenth-century dramatist who spent a number of years confined in Bedlam. The earliest play he had performed was entitled *Nero*. Roy Porter, *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane* (London: Phoenix, 1997), 3.
2. Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae* 18.63–64; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.
3. Traditions that Jesus was stoned to death by fellow Jews and then hanged (*b. Sanh.* 43a) are late and probably reflect subsequent anti-Christian polemic in which Jesus was accused of having been a false prophet (Deut 13.1–11; see also Deut 21.21–22; *m. Sanh.* 6.4; *Toledoth Jeshu*).
4. For example, 1 Cor 1.18, 23; Heb 12.2; Justin, *1 Apol.* 13.4; Origen, *Cels.* 6.10; Augustine, *Civ.* 19.23.
5. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 784.
6. Philo, *Legat.* 302. We should remember that in the Roman empire there was always a realm, evident in non-legal sources, that lay "between what is done by a law, and what is done by a lawfully appointed authority". Ramsay MacMullen, "Judicial Savagery in the Roman Empire," in *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 205. For example, Suetonius, *Galb.* 9.1; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.1.44, 47, 50; Tertullian, *Scap.* 4.1–4.
7. Anthony Ernest Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (London: Duckworth, 1982), 16.
8. Gerhard Schneider, "The Political Charge against Jesus (Lk 23:2)," in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, ed. Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 404.
9. John 19.12.
10. Matt 27.37, Mark 15.26, Luke 23.38; John 19:19, 21.
11. Ernst Bammel, "The Titulus," in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, ed. Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 353–64; Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah, from Gethsemane to the Grave* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 2:962–68.
12. The expression used by the mockers in Mark 15.32 (ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ) would have been a more appropriate way for a

Jewish person to describe the kingly claims associated with Jesus.

13. E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 317.
14. Theudas: Josephus, *A.J.* 20.97–98; Acts 5.36–37. The Egyptian: Josephus, *Bellum judaicum* 2.261; *A.J.* 20.171; Acts 21.28.
15. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.85–87.
16. Josephus, *B.J.* 2.57–59; *A.J.* 17.273–277; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.9.2. Tacitus is clear that the campaign against Simon of Peraea was directed by the Roman governor of Syria, and it seems the best explanation for the participation of Roman soldiers in the events as recounted by Josephus.
17. Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 34/35.2.1–48.
18. Tacitus, *Ann.* 2–4.
19. Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.61.
20. Tacitus, *Hist.* 3.48–49.
21. For a comprehensive treatment of such figures, see Thomas Grünewald, *Bandits in the Roman Empire: Myth and Reality*, trans. John Drinkwater (London: Routledge, 2004).
22. For the *Laureolus* mime see Mario Bonaria, ed., *Mimorum Romanorum Fragmenta*, Pubblicazioni dell'istituto di filologia classica 5 (Genoa: Istituto di filologia classica, 1955), 112. Josephus, *A.J.* 19.94; Suetonius, *Cal.* 57.2
23. See Josephus, *A.J.* 18.116–119; Matt 14.3–12, Mark 6.17–29; Luke 3.19–20. It is always possible that the disciples of John were persecuted, although the evidence is admittedly slim; it might explain the rapid emergence of a diaspora of followers of John evident in Acts of the Apostles (Acts 18.25 [Alexandria] and 19.1–7 [Ephesus]) and, rather more speculatively, the traditions about the fate of the 360 prophets of John in early Mandaean literature. See Edmondo Lupieri, *The Mandaeans: The Last Gnostics*, trans. Charles Hindley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 147.
24. See Kathleen M. Coleman, “Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 80 (1990): 48–49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/300280>.
25. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 544.
26. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 629.
27. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History*, 14.
28. Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 241.

29. Joel B. Green, "Crucifixion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 96.
30. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 544.
31. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 629.
32. Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*, 251.
33. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 295.
34. Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn, "Die Kreuzesstrafe während der frühen Kaiserzeit. Ihre Wirklichkeit und Wertung in der Umwelt des Urchristentums," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. II.25.1*, ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1982), 736.
35. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 318.
36. Philo, *Legat.* 302–3. See also Josephus, *B.J.* 2.169–177; *A.J.* 18.55–64, 85–89.
37. Mark 3.19b–21.
38. Matt 12.24, Mark 3.22, Luke 11.14; John 8.48.
39. See, for example, Mark 5.1–20; Aretaeus, *De causis et signis diuturnorum morborum* 1.6; *T. Sol.* 18.30.
40. We must be careful not to assume that individuals in the first century thought afflictions, even of this kind, necessarily had a demonic aetiology. See Darrel W. Amundsen and Gary B. Ferngren, "The Perception of Disease and Disease Causality in the New Testament," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. II.37.3*, ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, 2 37.3 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), 2950.
41. John 8.22.
42. See, for example, Caelius Aurelianus, *Chron.* 1.155. Although Caelius Aurelianus practised in the fifth century CE, this book is a Latin translation of Soranus' second-century CE work. Interestingly, suicides in the Hebrew Bible are never depicted as the result of mental illness but rational choice. As Fred Rosner remarks after surveying all the cases: "Each knew what lay ahead if he remained alive, namely, a prolonged, torturous martyrdom and/or disgrace to the God of Israel." Fred Rosner, *Medicine in the Bible and the Talmud: Selections from Classical Jewish Sources*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Yeshiva University Press, 1995), 276.
43. "Madness and insanity are often the result of drunkenness." Caelius

- Aurelianus, *Chron.* 1.175. For the link between drunkenness and madness in antiquity, see Pliny, *Nat.* 4.137–142; Herodotus, *Hist.* 6.84; Pausanias, *Descr.* 9.8.2.
44. For the association of prophecy with madness, see Jer 29:26; Hos 9; Josephus, *B.J.* 6.300–305; Caelius Aurelianus, *Chron.* 1.150. A useful discussion of this can be found in Laura Salah Nasrallah, *“An Ecstasy of Folly”: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity*, Harvard Theological Studies 52 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
 45. Matt 4.1–11, Mark 1.12–13, Luke 4.1–13.
 46. Aretaeus, *Sign. diut.* 1.6
 47. Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in libros evangeliorum* (Amsterdam: Johannes et Cornelius Blaeu, 1641), 484.
 48. Ben F. Meyer, “Jesus’ Ministry and Self-Understanding,” in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce David Chilton and Craig Alan Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 339.
 49. Fergus Millar, “The World of the Golden Ass,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 71 (1981): 63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/299497>.
 50. For example, Justin J. Meggitt, “Sources: Use, Abuse and Neglect: The Importance of Ancient Popular Culture,” in *Christianity at Corinth: The Scholarly Quest for the Corinthian Church*, ed. David G Horrell and Edward Adams (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 241–53.
 51. Albert Schweitzer, *Die psychiatrische Beurteilung Jesu: Darstellung und Kritik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913).
 52. Albert Schweitzer, *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus: Exposition and Criticism*, trans. Charles Rhind Joy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), 27.
 53. Schweitzer, *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus*, 74.
 54. Schweitzer, *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus*, 72.
 55. Justin J. Meggitt, “Psychology and the Historical Jesus,” in *Jesus and Psychology*, ed. Fraser Watts (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007), 16–26.
 56. Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. J. Fraser McLuskey and Irene McLuskey (London: Hodder, Stoughton, 1960), 24.
 57. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 479.
 58. It remains an issue more likely to be addressed in philosophical theology than biblical studies. For example, Stephen T. Davis, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?,” in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary*

Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall SJ, and Gerald O'Collins SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 221–45, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199248451.003.0010>; Daniel Howard-Snyder, “Was Jesus Mad, Bad, or God?... Or Merely Mistaken?,” *Faith and Philosophy* 21.4 (2004): 456–79.

59. John W. Miller, *Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997).
60. Donald Capps, *Jesus the Village Psychiatrist* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008); Capps, *Jesus: A Psychological Biography* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000).
61. Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 6.
62. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 324.
63. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 333. Given the likely influence of ideas found in texts such as 2 Macc 7.37–38, it is questionable how “strange” such a conviction would seem.
64. Jacques André, *Être médecin à Rome* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1987).
65. Audrey Cruse, *Roman Medicine* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004).
66. Ralph Jackson, *Doctors and Diseases in the Roman Empire* (London: British Museum Press, 1993).
67. Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).
68. Mirko D. Grmek, *Diseases in the Ancient Greek World*, trans. Mireille Muellner and Leonard Muellner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
69. G. E. R. Lloyd, *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
70. Robert Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World*, 2nd ed. (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2010).
71. Debra Hershkowitz, *The Madness of Epic: Reading Insanity from Homer to Statius* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).
72. Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece & Rome*, 3rd ed. (London: Duckworth, 2005).
73. Rebecca Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
74. For example, Julie Laskaris, *The Art Is Long: On the Sacred Disease and*

the Scientific Tradition, Studies in Ancient Medicine 25 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

75. This despite the growing sophistication of studies of other forms of illness in the Roman empire. For example, Patricia Anne Baker and Gillian Carr, eds., *Practitioners, Practices, and Patients: New Approaches to Medical Archaeology and Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2002). There have, of course, also been works speculating about the sanity of notorious emperors and other celebrities in antiquity. For a fascinating examination of trends in assessing the personality of perhaps the most notorious "mad" emperor, see Zvi Yavetz, "Caligula, Imperial Madness and Modern Historiography," *Klio* 78.1 (1996): 105–29.
76. Since this article was written, some significant works have appeared, such as Marke Ahonen, *Mental Disorders in Ancient Philosophy* (New York, NY: Springer, 2014); Philip Bosman, ed., *Mania: Madness in the Greco-Roman World*, Acta Classica Supplementum 3 (Pretoria: Classical Association of South Africa, 2009); William V. Harris, ed., *Mental Disorders in the Classical World* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
77. Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison: histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Plon, 1961).
78. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, ed. Frédéric Gros, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 2018). First published in 1976.
79. For example, Simon Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginity: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); David H. J. Larmour, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter, eds., *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
80. George Rosen, *Madness in Society: Chapters in the Historical Sociology of Mental Illness* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968). The only volume dedicated solely to this subject is the somewhat antiquated one of Agnes Carr Vaughan, *Madness in Greek Thought and Custom* (Baltimore, MD: J.H. Furst Company, 1919).
81. This is a problem that affects the study of mental illness in particular but also hinders the more general study of disability in antiquity. As Morag Cross observes: "It is very easy for an archaeological discussion of disability to consist of the bare bones of a history of the orthopaedic ward". Morag Cross, "Accessing the Inaccessible: Disability and Archaeology," in *The Archaeology of Identities*, ed. Timothy Insoll (London: Routledge, 2007), 179. See also Theya Molleson, "Archaeological Evidence for Attitudes to Disability in the

Past," *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 15.2 (1999): 69–77. The enormous difficulty in making sense of what material remains we do possess is seen in the influential article K. A. Dettwyler, "Can Paleopathology Provide Evidence for 'Compassion'?", *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 84.4 (1991): 375–84, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.1330840402>. There are, of course, other factors too, and it is hard not to agree with Mike Oliver's complaint that:

The issue of disability and the experiences of disabled people have been given scant consideration in academic circles. Both the issue and the experience have been marginalised. (Michael Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement*, Critical Texts in Social Work and the Welfare State [London: Macmillan Education, 1990], xi.)

82. See Cicero's complaint about the lack of precision in Greek terms used to describe madness (*Tusc.* 3.5).
83. Porter, *A Social History of Madness*, 8.
84. Kenneth M. Boyd, "Disease, Illness, Sickness, Health, Healing and Wholeness: Exploring Some Elusive Concepts," *Medical Humanities* 26.1 (2000): 9–17, <https://doi.org/10.1136/mh.26.1.9>.
85. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), 1. The more recent DSM-V is somewhat more optimistic. See American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-V*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 20.
86. Rosen, *Madness in Society*, 90.
87. Here I am assuming Peter Burke's definition of culture as "a system of shared meaning and value, and the symbolic forms (performances, artefacts) in which they are expressed or embodied". Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), xi.
88. Cecil G. Helman, *Culture, Health and Illness*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000), 171.
89. Porter, *A Social History of Madness*, 5.
90. Ruth Benedict, "Anthropology and the Abnormal," *Journal of General Psychology* 10.1 (1934): 59–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221309.1934.9917714>.
91. Percy Dunsheath and Margaret Miller, *Convocation in the University of London* (London: Athlone Press, 1958), 54.

92. For example, Thomas S. Szasz, *Law, Liberty, and Psychiatry: An Inquiry into the Social Uses of Mental Health Practices* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1963); Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct* (New York, NY: Hoeber-Harper, 1961); Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy: Mental Healing as Religion, Rhetoric and Repression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979). For a critical survey of the movement and its assumptions, see Digby Tantam, "The Anti-Psychiatry Movement," in *150 Years of British Psychiatry, 1841-1991*, ed. G. E. Berrios and Hugh L. Freeman (London: Gaskell, 1991), 333-47.
93. Rosen, *Madness in Society*, 102.
94. Josephus, *B.J.* 7.417-18.
95. The translation is from Owsei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 14.
96. Rosen, *Madness in Society*, 104.
97. Bearing in mind that: "The Roman Empire did not consist of a homogeneous culture, but of numerous societies with different beliefs and understandings about their world and how it functioned." Patricia Anne Baker, "Diagnosing Some Ills: The History and Archaeology of Roman Medicine," in *Practitioners, Practices and Patients: New Approaches to Medical Archaeology and Anthropology*, ed. Patricia Anne Baker and Gillian Carr (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 23.
98. For the likelihood that Pontius Pilate was of equestrian rank rather than a freedman (as was the governor Felix), see Helen K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, SNTSMS 100 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9. Pilate's *nomen gentilicium* indicates that he was probably from the clan of the Pontii of Samnium in Italy.
99. Josephus, *A.J.* 14.204, 19.365.
100. For the enduring popularity of Homer, see Joseph Farrell, "Roman Homer," in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 254-71; E. J. Kenney, "Books and Readers in the Roman World," in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature. Volume II, Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney and Wendell Vernon Clausen, Cambridge History Classical Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 3-32; Robert Lamberton, "Homer in Antiquity," in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry B. Powell, Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca

- Classica Batava. Supplementum 163 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 33–54.
101. See Homer, *Iliad* 6.200–2; Pseudo-Aristotle, *Problemata* 30.
 102. Sophocles, *Ajax* 581–2.
 103. See also Seneca, *Hercules Furens*.
 104. See Simone Beta, “Madness on the Comic Stage: Aristophanes’ Wasps and Euripides’ Heracles,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 40.2 (1999): 135–57.
 105. See, for example, the doctor’s remarks when faced with an apparently mad patient: “num larvatus aut cerritus?” (“possession or hallucination?”). Plautus, *Manacchi* 890 (5.4.2).
 106. L. L. Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition*, JSNTSup 293 (London: T&T Clark, 2005).
 107. Celsus wrote his encyclopedia during the reign of Tiberius, the medical section of which has survived and contains a sustained discussion of mental disorders. See Betty S. Spivack, “A. C. Celsus: Roman Medicus,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 46.2 (1991): 143–57, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/46.2.143>; Christian Schulze, *Celsus* (Hildesheim: Olm, 2001).
 108. Mark D. Grant, “Dietetic Responses in Galen to Madness,” *Classical Bulletin* 76.1 (2000): 61–70.
 109. Peter Brain, *Galen on Bloodletting A Study of the Origins, Development and Validity of His Opinions, with a Translation of the Three Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For example, Galen, 11.288–91 (Kühn).
 110. There are, for example, forty-five remedies for epilepsy in Dioscorides’ influential first-century CE work *De Materia Medica*. See Lucian, *Abdicatus* 4.
 111. As Cicero observed:

Diseases of the soul are more harmful and numerous than the diseases of the body. [...] Without question there is a medicine for the soul, philosophy, whose help must not be sought externally, as with diseases of the body, and we must exert ourselves with all our resources and strength so that we ourselves are able to heal ourselves. (Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.3.)
 - See also Celsus, *Med.* 3.18.11.
 112. M. G. Papageorgiou, “Incubation as a Form of Psychotherapy in the Care of Patients in Ancient and Modern Greece,” *Psychotherapy and*

Psychosomatics 26.1 (1975): 35–38, <https://doi.org/10.1159/000286896>; Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, *Truly beyond Wonders: Aelius Aristides and the Cult of Asclepius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

113. Campbell Bonner, "The Technique of Exorcism," *Harvard Theological Review* 36.1 (1943): 39–49, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816000029072>; Daniel Ogden, ed., *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 167–71. See also Mark 5.1–20; Matt 8.28–34; Luke 8.26–39; Josephus, *A.J.* 8.45–48; Lucian, *Philopseudes* 16; Origen, *Cels.* 1.68.
114. Maryse Waegeman, *Amulet and Alphabet: Magical Amulets in the First Book of Cyranides* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1987); Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 261–74. See Cyranides, 1.24.80–82.
115. Celsus, *Med.* 3.18.21.
116. See also Caelius Aurelianus, *Chron.* 172; Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* 4.9; Mark 5:3–4; Luke 8:29. Rosen, *Madness in Society*, 130.
117. See Rosen, *Madness in Society*, 100. Such a fate befell the paradigmatic madman of antiquity, Cleomenes of Sparta (Herodotus, *Hist.* 6.75).
118. Pausanias, *Descr.* 9.11.2.6.
119. Celsus, *Med.* 3.18.21.
120. It should not be assumed that there was any expectation in first-century cultures that those suffering from *μανία* could or should be cured. See Michael W. Dols, "Insanity in Byzantine and Islamic Medicine," in *Symposium on Byzantine Medicine*, ed. John Scarborough, Dumbarton Oaks Papers 38 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, 1985), 247.
121. Mark 3.19b–21. For example, the *Legis Duodecim Tabularum* 4.4. (Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.5). For the cultural significance of the Twelve Tables, see Cicero, *De or.* 1.44. Indeed, confinement seems to have been a legal obligation in Roman law. See Rosen, *Madness in Society*, 127. See also Plato, *Leg.* 11.929 and William G. Braude, ed., "The Midrash on Psalms," *Yale Judaica* 13 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 410.
122. For example, Philo, *Flacc.* 6.36–41; Aelian, *Varia Historia* 4.25 (although in this case a brother eventually intervened). Those remaining in the control of families did have "rights" of a kind. See, for example, Justinian, *Digest* 1.18.14.

123. For example, Artemidorus tells us that for a poor man to dream of singing songs in the marketplace or streets is a premonition of madness — as that is how the mad behaved (*Oneir.* 1.76). Similarly, it is auspicious to dream of being insane if you are sick because the insane walk around (*Oneir.* 3.42). Indeed, in the Talmud we find a dispute over the definition of insanity in which it is argued that someone should be categorised as mad for the purposes of judging their legal capacity if they are "one who goes out (that is roams about) alone at night, who sleeps in cemeteries, who tears his clothes" (*b. Hag.* 3b–4a). See also Aretaeus, *Sign. diut.* 1.6.
124. Rosen, *Madness in Society*, 88. For example, Phaedrus, *Fabulae Aesopicae* 3.14.1–3; Plato, *Euthyphro* 3 C; Philo, *Flacc.* 36–38. The popularity of "fools" as the butts of humour can be seen in the *Philogelos*, a joke book in which an idiot Σχολαστικὸς is the main protagonist. See Barry Baldwin, ed., *The Philogelos, or, Laughter-Lover*, London Studies in Classical Philology 10 (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1983).
125. Rosen, *Madness in Society*, 100.
126. Or in some cultures, rather more systematic violence. See Strabo, *Geogr.* 11.4.7. Strabo tells us that amongst the Albanians (though here he means those who lived in what is now Azerbaijan) those suffering from frenzy and who wander about alone, could be seized and bound, sumptuously looked after for a year, and then put to death.
127. Plautus, *Captivi* 547ff. See also Pliny, *Nat.* 28.7.
128. Plautus, *Poenulus* 527. See also Aristophanes, *Av.* 524; Sophocles, *Ajax* 255, 725.
129. Phaedrus, *Fabulae Aesopicae* 3.14.1–3; Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 3.42; see also Horace, *Ars* 455–456; Cicero, *Verr.* 2.4.148, Petronius, *Sat.* 92.
130. See Jane Ellen Harrison, *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921).
131. For the vulnerability of the sick, poor and disabled to neglect and lethal violence see, for example, Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4.10; Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia* 6.8.7; Suetonius, *Claud.* 25. See also Seneca, *Ep.* 12.3.
132. Most famously, for example, Plato, *Resp.* 410a.
133. Philo, *Flacc.* 6.36–41.
134. Josephus, *B.J.* 6.300–305.
135. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical*

Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew. Commentary on Matthew XIX-XXVIII, vol. 2 of ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 599.

136. Matt 27.29.
137. John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?: Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1996), 127.
138. Paul Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974), 100.
139. Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 361.
140. Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies*, 360–61.
141. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1998), 460.
142. For examples of the insane's lack of concern for their own lives see Aretaeus, *Sign. diut.* 1.5, 6; Horace, *Ars* 462–463; Mark 5.5. For their failure to communicate meaningfully with those around them, see Celsus, *De Med.* 3.18.11; Caelius Aurelianus, *Chron.* 1.148.
143. Matt 21.12–13, Mark 11.15–19, Luke 19.45–48, John 2.13–17.
144. See Mark 11.18. See also Mark 15.29 par. Matt 27.40; John 2:19; Acts 6:14. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 301–6.
145. Matt 21.12–13, Mark 11.15–19, Luke 19.45–48, John 2.13–22.
146. Celsus, *Med.* 1.183–4.
147. E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 153.
148. Caelius Aurelianus, *Chron.* 1.146.
149. "A madman's illness is less serious when accompanied by laughter than by gravity." Celsus, *Med.* 3.18.20
150. Mark 15.5, see also Matt 27.12, 14. Of course, the tradition of Jesus' silence may well have developed under the influence of Isa 53.7 (see, for example, Acts 8.32). See also 1 Pet 2.22–23.
151. Horace, *Ars* 462–463.
152. For example, Mark 10.15, 23; Luke 6.20 par. Matt 5.3; Luke 11.2 par. Matt 6.10; Luke 13.28 par. Matt 8.11; Matt 12.31; Luke 14.15.
153. For example, Mark 1.14, 3.27, 14.25; Luke 11.20 par. Matt 12.28; *Gos. Thom.* 82

154. For example, Mark 3.14, 6.7; Luke 22.30 par. Matt 19.28; Matt 20.21; Luke 8.1, 18.31.
155. For example, Luke 10.23 par. Matt 13.16; Luke 16.16 par. Matt 11.12; Luke 10.18, 17.21; *Gos. Thom.* 51.
156. Galen 8.190 (Kühn)
157. Galen 8.190 (Kühn)
158. Aelian, *Varia Historia* 4.25.
159. Horace, *Ep.* 2.2.126.
160. Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 7.33–34.
161. Caelius Aurelianus, *Chron.* 1.152.
162. Alexander of Tralles, *Medici libri duodecim* 1.605, 607.
163. For an analysis of penal mockery and its unintended theological consequences, see Joel Marcus, “Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125.1 (2006): 73–87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27638347>.
164. Matt 27.27–3, Mark 15.16–20 and also John 19.1–3. This probably lies behind the account of the mocking by Herod’s soldiers in Luke 23.11.
165. For other parallels see: the accounts of the mockery of prisoners by pirates (Plutarch, *Pomp.* 24.7–8); the game Basilinda (Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.114; Pollux, *Onomasticon* 9.110); theatrical mimes (P. Oxy. frag. 413); carnival festivals such as the Sacaeian feast (Strabo, *Geog.* 11.8.4–5; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 4.66–70); the Saturnalia (Seneca, *Apocol.* 8.2); and the Kronia (Porphyry, *Abst.* 2.54, 56). See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah, from Gethsemane to the Grave*, 2:874–77.
166. See Seneca, *Apocol.* 8:2.
167. Aretaeus, *Sign. diut.* 1.6
168. Philo, *Flacc.* 38. See Marcus, “Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation,” 74.
169. *Tituli* could be somewhat sarcastic. For evidence of their use see also Suetonius, *Cal.* 32.2; *Dom.* 10.1; Tertullian, *Apol.* 2.20; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 54.3.7; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.1.44; and Brown, *The Death of the Messiah, from Gethsemane to the Grave*, 2:963. Placards could be employed more generally to convey a range of different information to crowds. See Suetonius, *Claud.* 21; Cassius Dio, *Hist.* 60.13.5, 69.16; Aulus Gellius, *Noct. att.* 5.14; the Médaillon de Cavillargues, which is in the Musée Archéologique (Nîmes). See Aldrete Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome*, Ancient Society and History (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999),

- 79, 122, 124.
170. Matt 27.30, Mark 15.19.
 171. Matt 27.26, Mark 15.15.
 172. Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 33.36, 3; Josephus, *B.J.* 2.306; 5.446–451; Philo, *Flacc.* 72, 84.
 173. Although, of course, an important point: in one sense Jesus ben Ananias was not, according to Josephus, mad at all. His predictions were quite right. For flogging of the insane as a regular treatment, intended to bring them to their senses, Caelius Aurelianus, *Chron.* 1.175, 179.
 174. Luke 23.36; John 19.29.
 175. Celsus, *Med.* 3.19.4
 176. Cicero, *Verr.* 2.4.148
 177. Celsus, *Med.* 3.18.3–4.
 178. See, for example, Justin, *Dial.* 69; Orgien, *Cels.* 1.28, 68. His reputation as such became so great that within a few decades of his death, his name is found being used on magical inscriptions and his crucified form depicted on amulets. See Samuel Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament*, 2nd ed., Symbolae Osloenses Fasciculi Suppletorii 20 (Oslo: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1966), 14; Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978), 161. For the accusation that Jesus was a false teacher see Lucian, *Peregr.* 13.
 179. For example, Acts 10.38. See Justin J. Meggitt, “Magic, Healing and Early Christianity: Consumption and Competition,” in *Meanings of Magic: From the Bible to Buffalo Bill*, ed. Amy Wygant (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2006), 89–114; Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century*, Patristic Monograph Series 10 (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1983).
 180. It can only be inferred from complaints by opponents of Jesus that he carried out his exorcisms by the power of Beelzebul, rather than God (Matt 9.32–34; 12.22–24; Mark 3.22–27; Luke 11.14–16).
 181. See, for example, 1 Cor 1.18, 23 and (probably) the Alexamenos graffito. See Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 27–28.
 182. Patrick J. Leman and Marco Cinnirella, “A Major Event Has a Major Cause: Evidence for the Role of Heuristics in Reasoning about

- Conspiracy Theories,” *Social Psychological Review* 9.2 (2007): 18–28.
183. See above, footnote 6.
184. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 784.
185. See Luke 6.27–28 par. Matt 5.44. See William Klassen, “The Authenticity of the Command: ‘Love Your Enemies,’” in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 385–407.

CHAPTER 6.

"MORE INGENIOUS THAN LEARNED"? EXAMINING THE QUEST FOR THE NON-HISTORICAL JESUS

THE SALIENCE OF THE QUESTION

Virtually no scholar working in the field of New Testament studies or early Christian history doubts the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth.¹ Indeed, the arguments of those who deny his historicity are usually judged by most working professionally in the discipline to be “so weak or bizarre that they relegate them to footnotes or often ignore them completely”.² Works advocating such a position are often dismissed “with amused contempt”.³

However, the denial of the historicity of Jesus has become culturally prominent in recent years, and especially so since the turn of the century, with, for example, a recent poll in England finding that 40 per cent of respondents do not believe that Jesus “actually lived”,⁴ a development that owes itself, at least in part, to the popularisation of a new wave of scholarship promoting this idea. While G. A. Wells was “almost a lone voice”⁵ in support of the non-historicity thesis prior to the year 2000,⁶ that is evidently not the case now, even if we decide to restrict ourselves to those qualified within the field.⁷ In more recent years, Robert M. Price and Thomas L. Brodie, both established and active New Testament scholars — the latter a notable figure in the field of Johannine studies⁸ — have published works arguing for the non-

historicity of Jesus,⁹ as has Richard Carrier, a classicist.¹⁰ The late Thomas Harpur, a former professor of New Testament and New Testament Greek, did likewise.¹¹ Two substantive collections of essays containing contributions by those denying the historicity of Jesus, including some by established biblical scholars, have also appeared.¹²

A small number of New Testament specialists have seen this growth in scholarship denying the historicity of Jesus as something that needs to be addressed and have published responses.¹³ This is not just the case for those who find the claim of Jesus' non-existence theologically as well as historically problematic, such as Stanley E. Porter,¹⁴ but also for Bart Ehrman and Maurice Casey, both of whom have stated that they have no religious stake in the matter.¹⁵ While addressing this thesis is not something that most New Testament scholars relish, or, indeed, have ever relished,¹⁶ it is clear that the subject should merit far greater attention from those working professionally in the field than is now the case. It is no longer tenable for most scholars to ignore it, given the wider context within which the academic study of the New Testament currently takes place. Nor, indeed, is it healthy for the discipline, given the formative role that the question of the existence of Jesus has played since its inception, even if this has largely been forgotten. Albert Schweitzer, for example, could say of Bruno Bauer's *Kritik der Evangelien und Geschichte ihres Ursprungs* (1850–1),¹⁷ a work which denied the historicity of Jesus, that it was “the ablest and most complete collection of difficulties of the Life of Jesus to be found anywhere”.¹⁸ Indeed, the question of the historicity of Jesus could be said to be a foundational, or, at the very least, a pressing, prior question for those wishing to say *anything* about the historical Jesus.¹⁹ It can also be pedagogically useful to address their arguments; as Graham Stanton said of the work of Wells, the latter's position “is worth taking seriously, for it

raises important issues for the student of the gospels".²⁰ Nor is the question quite as anachronistic as is often assumed: although no critic of early Christianity in antiquity ever doubted the historical existence of Jesus — it is not an argument used, for example, by Trypho, Celsus, Lucian or Porphyry²¹ — the docetist tendency within the early churches does bear some resemblance to such a position, even if there are significant differences.²²

However, in what follows, I do not wish to address the specific arguments of those who deny the historical existence of Jesus. Other scholars within the field are doing this today,²³ and past contributions by Shirley Jackson Case,²⁴ F. C. Conybeare,²⁵ Maurice Goguel,²⁶ Albert Schweitzer,²⁷ H. G. Wood,²⁸ Walter Weaver²⁹ and Robert Van Voorst³⁰ contain much of value. It would be a rather thankless and dispiriting task to correct the egregious errors of fact, method and interpretation that characterise some of the most popular contributions to the subject in the past and present, seen in, for example, the work of Kersey Graves³¹ or Acharya S,³² but it would be unfair for the contributions of Brodie, Price, Carrier and Wells to "be tarnished with the same brush or be condemned with guilt by association";³³ indeed such scholars are generally as critical of the failings of the excesses of fellow mythicists as any others.³⁴ Rather, my concern in this paper is to reflect critically on some of the substantive characteristics of the scholarship that has been generated by the debate over the historicity of Jesus, notably its terminology, historiography and dominant tropes. Nonetheless, given the general lack of awareness of this subject in contemporary New Testament scholarship, it is necessary to summarise briefly the arguments employed by those who deny the historicity of Jesus before doing this.

THE ARGUMENTS OF THE MYTHICISTS

Although there are substantial variations between those scholars that deny the historicity of Jesus,³⁵ nonetheless, most make use of a small number of core “negative” arguments, contending that:³⁶

(1) There is no independent, non-Christian, evidence for Jesus. The references to Jesus found in the few non-Christian sources that appear to mention him³⁷ are either dependent upon Christian testimony for their knowledge of Jesus, and therefore irrelevant, or interpolations by later Christian scribes.

(2) The earliest Christian sources that appear to mention Jesus, the letters of Paul, do not demonstrate any knowledge of an earthly Jesus. On the few occasions where they appear to do so, this is a result of poor exegesis or interpolation by later Christian scribes.

(3) The gospels cannot be trusted as sources for historical data. They are full of contradictions, discrepancies, supernatural claims and obvious bias.

(4) The gospels are not independent witnesses to Jesus, but all go back to one, unreliable, source: Mark. Mark is a work of fiction not history. Mark was also written far too late to give any authentic historical facts.

In addition to these arguments, a “positive” case is usually made to explain how, if there is no evidence for the historical Jesus, we should account for the emergence of the early churches and their beliefs, especially those they held about him.³⁸ The answers provided range widely, from the influence of astrological mystery cults and pre-Christian gnostic sects,³⁹ to the literary activity of a religious community.⁴⁰ They rarely possess the virtue of economy and, except in cases that posit some kind of conspiracy⁴¹ (something not found in the scholarly contributions), they do not tend to identify a specific, proximate cause.⁴² This sets them apart from most accounts of Christian

origins which not only give the historical Jesus a role in the genesis of the new faith but usually emphasise the significance of specific events around his life and death in its creation.

If one is tempted, unwisely, to dismiss the arguments of those who deny the historicity of Jesus en masse based on some of the wilder flights of fancy that are more likely to stick in the mind, such as those of Edwin Johnson⁴³ or his more modern equivalents, it is helpful to remember the basic thesis common to most mythicists. This is far less complex and therefore far less improbable. It is described by Carrier as follows:

Jesus was originally a god, just like any other god (properly speaking, a demigod in pagan terms; an archangel in Jewish terms; in either sense, a deity), who was later historicized, just as countless other gods were, and ... the Gospel of Mark (or Mark's source) originated the Christian myth familiar to us by building up an edifying and symbolically meaningful tale for Jesus, drawing on passages from the Old Testament and popular literature, coupled with elements of revelation and pious inspiration.⁴⁴

Having summarised the arguments of those denying the historicity of Jesus, let us now move on to some critical reflections on the scholarship that has been generated by the debate.

TERMINOLOGY

The terminology commonly used in the debate to label the two positions is problematic. Those who reject the historicity of Jesus are often referred to as “mythicists”,⁴⁵ and such scholars regularly label those who disagree with them “historicists”.⁴⁶ However, the first term is one that is rarely the subject of sustained critical reflection from participants and its meaning is seldom defined.⁴⁷ It appears to be used primarily to mean one who believes that Jesus was a myth and the term “myth” is taken to mean “a story that has no historical basis, a history-

like narrative that in fact did not happen”.⁴⁸ Although most definitions of myth across disciplines do associate it in some way with a story,⁴⁹ the notion that the defining feature of a story for it to be classified as a myth is that it has no historical basis is a rather narrow, etiolated understanding of the term, even if it does have the benefit of reflecting lay usage.⁵⁰ For anyone involved in the critical study of religion or biblical studies⁵¹ who has an awareness of the range of ways that myth has been defined and theorised from antiquity to the present,⁵² this does seem a missed opportunity; limiting our thinking to whether myths tell stories that lack historical veracity fails, for example, to address questions around their genesis and mutability.⁵³

The second term widely used, but which is also problematic, is “historicist”. This label is given, almost exclusively by mythicists to those who defend the historicity of Jesus. Given the meanings usually ascribed to the term within the humanities and social sciences, none of which seems obviously relevant to what mythicists wish to convey, this seems somewhat eccentric (in crude terms, a historicist is normally said to be someone who insists “on the prime importance of historical context in the interpretation of texts of any kind”, something that few mythicists would wish to eschew).⁵⁴ The use of this term is emblematic of the distance between some of those espousing mythicism and standard academic discourse.⁵⁵

HISTORIOGRAPHY

This is not the place to provide a comprehensive overview of the history of those who have denied the existence of the historical Jesus and document the responses that they have generated; there are helpful surveys of the most influential contributions in the works of Casey, Ehrman, Van Voorst and Weaver,⁵⁶ and those by Case, Drews, Goguel, Roberston, Schweitzer and Wood⁵⁷ provide useful summaries of previous scholarship.

Nonetheless, a number of characteristics of the way in which the history of the debate is usually told invite comment.

Normally, those who attempt to write a brief history of mythicism begin with some perfunctory remarks about it starting in earnest with the work of Bruno Bauer, move on to the contributions of some of the “Radical Dutch School”, such as Allard Pierson, Abraham Loman and Gustaaf van den Bergh van Eysinga,⁵⁸ and then, in the English-speaking world, J. M. Robertson in the UK,⁵⁹ and perhaps W. B. Smith in the US,⁶⁰ before making remarks about Albert Kalthoff⁶¹ and Peter Jensen,⁶² culminating, at least initially, with Arthur Drews⁶³ or possibly, a little later, in France, with Paul-Louis Couchoud.⁶⁴ Then follows silence, more or less, with perhaps some mention given to Alvin Kuhn,⁶⁵ but with Wells depicted as the leading and almost only advocate of the theory in the later twentieth century until the sudden explosion of publications from about 2000. Sometimes the origins of the movement might be dated slightly earlier than Bauer, with the claim that Constantin François Chassebœuf de Volney or Charles François Dupuis were the first to deny the historicity of Jesus at the end of the eighteenth century,⁶⁶ and perhaps some space might be given to the nineteenth-century lay Egyptologist Gerald Massey,⁶⁷ who continues to be influential among some mythicists.⁶⁸ Otherwise, there is little variation in this story, this myth of mythicist origins. However, this way of telling the story has its problems.⁶⁹

The “Quest” for the non-historical Jesus is usually said to have had its high-water mark in “the first decades of the twentieth century”,⁷⁰ and is normally associated with what is customarily referred to as the “First Quest for the Historical Jesus”. However, Fernando Bermejo-Rubio has acutely observed that this prevailing periodisation of historical Jesus scholarship, with its familiar three quests, the stuff of countless New Testament introductory textbooks, might well “serve certain ideological

(more specifically, theological) interests”,⁷¹ effectively consigning certain critical problems to “oblivion”⁷² by making it appear that questions that had been raised in the past had somehow been settled; that, for example, Schweitzer’s *Quest of the Historical Jesus* was a definitive contribution that rendered all that preceded it obsolete. If Bermejo-Rubio is correct, it seems especially telling that the question of the non-historicity of Jesus is traditionally presented as belonging to this first phase of critical scholarship, as though the questions it raised were settled a century ago. In fact, there were substantive scholarly contributions *after* Drews, notably from the Soviet Union, where the theory was actively promoted, something well known from the opening pages of Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* (1967).⁷³

However, if we are tempted to rectify this ideologically loaded narrative of the history of the question, by providing a smooth, linear, diachronic account of the development of the Christ-myth theory, from de Volney and Dupuis, or Bauer, to the present day, this would also be misleading. In the case of the denial of the historicity of Jesus we are dealing with a *way of thinking* about the origins of Christianity and not, for the most part, a self-consciously academic *tradition*. On occasion those who advocated the idea did think in terms of it possessing a discernible intellectual lineage; Drews, for example, could explicitly acknowledge his debt to the works of Robertson and Smith in *Die Christusmythe* (1909) and some years later publish a study entitled *Die Leugnung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (1926), a work that attempted to legitimise his thesis by situating it within a much larger, long-established body of similar scholarship. However, genealogies, as biblical scholars know for other reasons, can be a little misleading. For example, although Bauer is often credited with being the first making a sustained, critical case for mythicism, his own work seems to have had little influence, at least initially, on

the “Radical Dutch School”, some of whom became prominent academic advocates of the thesis a few decades later.⁷⁴ Telling the story diachronically also fails to make sense of those who have arrived at their position apparently without the knowledge of any preceding mythicist scholarship. This is evident, for example, in the work of Brodie, who, in *Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (tellingly subtitled “Memoir of a Discovery”), describes reaching his conclusion with no reference to earlier advocates of mythicism. Instead, for him, the denial of the historicity of Jesus came as a natural consequence of the development of his own thinking about the literary nature of the gospel texts in reaction to assumptions within the field, not least its presumption of oral tradition.⁷⁵

Identifying the earliest appearance of the Christ-myth theory is also not straightforward. Given that the denial of the historicity of Jesus was sometimes a rather dangerous idea to hold, if we are to tell the story solely with reference to publications that *explicitly* advocate the position we miss much. There is evidence of developed mythicist beliefs in a variety of sources prior to de Volney and Dupuis, though it often comes to us indirectly. The emergence of British and Irish deists is especially significant in this respect. Their role in initiating the critical study of Christian origins has only recently been rediscovered by biblical scholars,⁷⁶ but so far little attention has been paid to the evidence that at least some deists clearly held mythicist views, even if none did so openly in print. For example, we can see this as early as 1677 in the complaint made by Edward Stillingfleet, the Anglican latitudinarian, against an unnamed deist:⁷⁷

But you seem to imply, That all this Story concerning Christ was invented long after the pretended time of his being in the World, Why may not you as well suspect, that Julius Caesar lived before Romulus; or that Augustus lived at the Seige of Troy? For you might

as well reject all History upon such grounds as those you assign; and think Mahomet as right in his Chronology, as the Bible. It is time for us to burn all our Books, if we have lived in such a Cheat all this while. Methinks you might as well ask, whether Lucretia were not Pope Joan? Or Alexander the sixth, one of the Roman Emperours? Or whether Luther were not the Emperour of Turkey? For there is no greater evidence of any History in the World, than there is, that all the things reported in the New Testament were done at that time, when they are pretended to be.⁷⁸

We also learn from Voltaire that in the early eighteenth century a number of those associated with the exiled English deist Henry St John Bolingbroke denied the existence of Jesus. They appear to have done so on the grounds that the gospel accounts of Jesus' life were unbelievable and contradictory. Voltaire found their position unconvincing and judged them "more ingenious than learned".⁷⁹

Indeed, if we look solely for texts that *openly* denied the historicity of Jesus, we are not paying attention to the mode of discourse common at the time, especially among religious radicals, which was often deliberately indirect. In the words of George Berkeley, freethinkers tended to make use of "Hints and Allusions, expressing little, insinuating much",⁸⁰ with the aim of undermining religious belief by "slow and insensible Degrees".⁸¹ This is, perhaps, best epitomised by a famous footnote found in the first volume of Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), which reads: "Apollonius of Tyana was born about the same time as Jesus Christ. His life (that of the former) is related in so fabulous a manner by his disciples, that we are at a loss to discover whether he was a sage, an impostor, or a fanatic."⁸²

Such writers often employed ridicule to distance the readers from their previous convictions, and to introduce them to possible ways of thinking that could not necessarily be spelled out.⁸³ This is especially apparent in Thomas Woolston's *Six*

Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour (1727–30), where “ridicule was a key component in his new critical approach”,⁸⁴ and a characteristic of his hermeneutics that he happily acknowledged.⁸⁵ Woolston attempted to show how absurd a literal reading of the miracle stories could be, only to offer in their place ludicrously strained and involved allegorical interpretations, often constructed from erroneous or fabricated patristic quotations. The effect, which Woolston fully intended, was to undermine the authority of the gospel accounts, and he was, as James Herrick has observed, more than happy to “cast doubt even on the historical existence of Jesus” in his exegesis.⁸⁶

Of course, such scepticism about the historicity of Jesus was not solely the preserve of some deists, and there is evidence of its presence in other radical circles too, long before the works of de Volney and Dupuis. For example, the anonymous author of *Historical and Critical Reflections on Mahometanism and Socinianism* (1712) complained, in the context of an attack on William Vorstius, a notable antitrinitarian, that some people regarded the words of Suetonius, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger concerning Jesus — key non-Christian testimony for his existence — as interpolated.⁸⁷

TROPES IN THE SCHOLARSHIP

In addition to matters of terminology and historiography, a handful of recurrent themes or motifs are evident in the arguments presented by the protagonists in the debate and warrant further critical reflection. Three in particular stand out: irrationality, history and authority.

IRRATIONALITY

It is common in this debate to see accusations of irrationality regularly deployed, either directly or by analogy. N. T. Wright,

for example, when invited to discuss a popular mythicist work by the BBC, declined, replying “that this was like asking a professional astronomer to debate with the authors of a book claiming the moon was made of green cheese.”⁸⁸ Indeed, it is not uncommon for New Testament scholars to make a further, but related, accusation about those advocating the Christ-myth theory, namely that they are indistinguishable from conspiracy theorists.⁸⁹ Claims of irrationality are regularly made by advocates of the Christ-myth thesis too. The title of a book by Frank Zindler, a prominent figure in the movement,⁹⁰ which contains many essays on the subject, is indicative of this: *Through Atheist Eyes: Scenes from a World That Won't Reason*.⁹¹

In the case of a number of mythicists, the use of such language is unsurprising. Some of those denying the historicity of Jesus are writing from a tradition which explicitly identifies itself as “rationalist”⁹² and for them the criterion of rational validity is not just a methodological foundation but also has considerable symbolic value.⁹³ However, the accusations of irrationality made by those defending the historicity of Jesus are of a rather different kind and have a different function, and are indicative of significant problems. On the one hand, they are often very wide of the mark. While some works by mythicists could be said to be characterised by a particular explanatory or rhetorical style common to conspiracy literature⁹⁴ and to contain conspiracies that would make Dan Brown blush,⁹⁵ most do not. Indeed, Robertson, a popular advocate of the Christ-myth theory in Britain in the early twentieth century, wrote books against the belief that Bacon authored Shakespeare, allegedly distressed that Mark Twain had gone to his grave believing in this popular conspiracy.⁹⁶ On the other hand, even more importantly, accusations of “madness” (like those of “badness” or “magic”) often reflect and enforce inequitable relationships of power,⁹⁷ stigmatising those who have less, and in this case marginalising

and delegitimising both the questioners and the question itself, however unintentionally. This does not seem a very helpful way to proceed when faced with a question that, at base, is a perfectly reasonable one for any intelligent person to ask.

HISTORY

It is hard to read far in this debate without encountering fierce arguments about what does or does not constitute good history and who is or is not a historian. This trope has been present from the outset, and is evident in, for example, the plethora of contributions that include substantial discussions of historical method, or dedicate initial chapters to this subject.⁹⁸

Emblematic of this concern is the recent attempt by Richard Carrier to promote the use of Bayes' theorem when making judgements on the historicity of Jesus, a theory of probability widely used in statistics and perhaps better known among epidemiologists than biblical scholars, and something that he believes will establish a historical method that will not be constrained by the prior commitments of the protagonists.⁹⁹ Most of the current contributors to the debate are keen also to identify themselves as "historians" in their texts,¹⁰⁰ or to seek approval of their arguments from historians working in other fields, and also to deny that opponents merit that designation.¹⁰¹ In doing this, they share something with significant contributors of the past too — Goguel, for example, famously referred to the influential work of Couchoud in the early twentieth century as "the dream of a poet rather than the work of a historian".¹⁰²

Although such interest in "history" is hardly surprising as we are dealing with historicity, arguments about "history" in this debate are not just about professional expertise or about technical disagreements regarding method but are indicative of a deliberate rhetorical strategy too. Many claims to being a historian are about self-presentation, about being the person

who can legitimately claim those somewhat antiquated but still significant mantles of objectivity or neutrality, something evident, for example, in Ehrman's words:

Jesus existed, and those vocal persons who deny it do so not because they have considered the evidence with the dispassionate eye of the historian, but because they have some other agenda that this denial serves. From a dispassionate point of view, there was a Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰³

But New Testament scholars should concede that the kind of history that is deemed acceptable in their field is, at best, somewhat eccentric. Most biblical scholars would be a little unsettled if, for example, they read an article about Apollonius of Tyana in a journal of ancient history that began by arguing for the historicity of supernatural events before defending the veracity of the miracles ascribed to him, yet would be unsurprised to see an article making the same arguments in a journal dedicated to the study of the historical Jesus.¹⁰⁴

Indeed, the lack of conventional historical training on the part of biblical scholars may well be evident in the failure of any scholar involved in discussing the Christ-myth debate to mention long-established historiographical approaches associated with the study of the poor in the past, such as History from Below, Microhistory, or Subaltern Studies,¹⁰⁵ approaches that might help us determine what kind of questions can be asked and what kind of answers can reasonably be expected to be given when we scrutinise someone who is depicted as coming from such a non-elite context.

For example, given that most human beings in antiquity left no sign of their existence, and the poor as individuals are virtually invisible,¹⁰⁶ all we can hope to do is try to establish, in a general sense, the lives that they lived. Why would we expect any non-Christian evidence for the *specific* existence of someone of the socio-economic status of a figure such as Jesus at all? To deny

his existence based on the absence of such evidence, even if that were the case, has problematic implications; you may as well deny the existence of pretty much everyone in the ancient world. Indeed, the attempt by mythicists to dismiss the Christian sources could be construed, however unintentionally, as exemplifying what E. P. Thompson called “the enormous condescension of posterity”¹⁰⁷ in action, functionally seeking to erase a collection of data, extremely rare in the Roman empire, that depicts the lives and interactions of non-elite actors and seems to have originated from them too.

AUTHORITY

The subject of authority is also something to which the protagonists in the debate regularly return. It is not uncommon for individual contributors to make much of their qualifications and professional standing within disciplines that they believe to be relevant, or, occasionally, to claim the opposite, that somehow *not* possessing the requisite skills and qualifications means that they are blissfully free from disciplinary presuppositions and entanglements.¹⁰⁸ However, it is the claims to *collective* authority as it appears in the debate that are especially worthy of note.

It is not unusual to find those who are professionally trained in biblical studies refer to their membership of something that they describe as the “guild”; and consensus within the “guild” is regularly invoked to make it clear that the Christ-myth position is one that is untenable.¹⁰⁹ On the one hand, this is perfectly understandable. Although some mythicists are adamant that “truth is not a democracy” or complain about the “fallacy of consensus”, some others, such as Carrier, are aware that this consensus of experts is a very serious matter and weighs heavily against the plausibility of their position.¹¹⁰ However, unlike “guilds” in professions such as law or medicine, it is not apparent what members of the “guild” of biblical scholars have in common,

other than a shared object of study and competence in a few requisite languages, and therefore what value an alleged consensus among them really has, especially on what is a historical rather than a linguistic matter. Indeed, while it is true that some members do have the academic freedom to arrive at any position they find convincing about the question of Jesus' historicity,¹¹¹ this is clearly not the case for many who are also members of the "guild" and carry out their scholarship in confessional contexts, as the apparent silencing of Brodie indicates.¹¹²

CONCLUSION

The question of the historicity of Jesus is unlikely to go away in the near future, however much some scholars of the New Testament may wish otherwise, and nor should it. This question does not belong to the past and nor is it irrational to raise it. It should not be dismissed with problematic appeals to expertise and authority and nor should it be viewed as unwelcome, as a "lurking monster present wherever critical studies are recognized and proceed".¹¹³ Just as Schweitzer took it seriously in the early twentieth century, so should those working on the historical Jesus today. The limited number of specialists who have engaged in the debate in recent years should be thanked for what has often been a somewhat thankless and fraught undertaking, though clearly, as with any question in the study of the New Testament and the origins of Christianity, there is considerably more to do. Indeed, if we decide, with Voltaire, that at least *some* contemporary advocates of the non-historicity of Jesus are really "more ingenious than learned", taking this question seriously may, at the very least, prove beneficial in raising the standard of debate and the wider understanding — in fact, even self-understanding — of what New Testament scholars do and how they do it.¹¹⁴

Notes

1. It is not the case that none does, as is often claimed or implied. See, for example, Samuel Byrskog, "The Historicity of Jesus: How Do We Know That Jesus Existed?," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmén and S. E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 2183; Charles E. Carlston, "Prologue," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 3.
2. Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 6. For example, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume One: Roots of the Problem and the Person*, 5 vols. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991), 87.
3. G. A. Wells, "The Historicity of Jesus," in *Jesus in History and Myth*, ed. R. Joseph Hoffmann and Gerald A. Larue (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1986), 27.
4. Barna Group, *Talking Jesus: Perceptions of Jesus, Christians and Evangelism in England* (Ventura, CA, 2015), 5, 9.
5. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 14.
6. See G. A. Wells, *Cutting Jesus down to Size: What Higher Criticism Has Achieved and Where It Leaves Christianity* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2009); Wells, *Did Jesus Exist?* (London: Pemberton, 1975); Wells, "Is There Independent Confirmation of What the Gospels Say of Jesus?," *Free Inquiry* 31 (2011): 19–25; Wells, *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1982); Wells, "The Historicity of Jesus"; Wells, *The Jesus Legend* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1996); Wells, *The Jesus of the Early Christians* (London: Pemberton, 1971).
7. See Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2012), 19.
8. See, for example, Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
9. Thomas L. Brodie, *Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Memoir of a Discovery* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012); Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000); Price, *Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2003); Price, "Jesus at the Vanishing Point," in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R.

Eddy (London: SPCK, 2010), 55–83; Price, *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011).

10. Richard Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014); Carrier, “Origen, Eusebius, and the Accidental Interpolation in Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 20.200,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 20.4 (2012): 489–514, <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2012.0029>; Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes’s Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2012); Carrier, “Thallus and the Darkness at Christ’s Death,” *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 8 (2011): 185–91; Carrier, “The Prospect of a Christian Interpolation in Tacitus, Annals 15.44,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 68.3 (2014): 264–83, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700720-12341171>.
11. Tom Harpur, *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2004); Harpur, *Water into Wine: An Empowering Vision of the Gospels* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2007). Harpur held his post at Wycliffe College, Toronto, from 1964 to 1971.
12. R. Joseph Hoffmann, ed., *Sources of Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010); Thomas L. Thompson and Thomas S. Verenna, eds., *“Is This Not the Carpenter?”: The Question of the Historicity of the Figure of Jesus* (London: Equinox, 2012). Thomas Thompson, a Hebrew Bible scholar, has also written a volume arguing against the historicity of Jesus. See Thomas L. Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2005).
13. For comprehensive responses, see Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*; Maurice Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). For criticisms of Price, see John Dominic Crossan et al., “Responses: John Dominic Crossan, Luke Timothy Johnson, James D. G. Dunn, Darrell L. Bock,” in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (London: SPCK, 2010), 84–103. For criticisms of Brodie, see Jeremy Corley, “Review Article: Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Memoir of a Discovery,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 79.2 (2014): 177–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140014524123>; Seán Freyne, “Closing the Door Too Early,” *Doctrine and Life* 63.6 (2013): 4–8; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Understanding the World of the Ancients,” *Doctrine and Life* 63.6 (2013): 9–15; G. R. Norton, “A Question of Methodology?,” *Doctrine and Life* 63.6 (2013): 16–24. For criticisms of Harpur, see Stanley E. Porter and Stephen J. Bedard, *Unmasking the Pagan Christ: An Evangelical Response to the Cosmic Christ Idea*

(Toronto: Clements, 2006). For criticisms of Carrier, see especially Daniel N. Gullotta, "On Richard Carrier's Doubts: A Response to Richard Carrier's on the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 15.2 (2017): 310–46, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455197-01502009>. For a critique of one of the key arguments of those denying historicity, see Simon J. Gathercole, "The Historical and Human Existence of Jesus in Paul's Letters," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 16.2 (2018): 183–212, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455197-01602009>. Brief references to the debate can also be found in some other works, such as Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Jesus und das Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 180, 206.

14. Porter and Bedard, *Unmasking the Pagan Christ*.
15. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 5; see also 71, 333; Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument*, 36–41, 203.
16. For example, Schweitzer's complaint that the scholarship of Albert Kalthoff, a leading mythicist of the early twentieth century, produced controversy that was "wearisome and unproductive". Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus.*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2001), 283.
17. Bruno Bauer, *Kritik der Evangelien und Geschichte ihres Ursprungs*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Gustav Hempel, 1850).
18. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 142.
19. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 2.
20. Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 144.
21. Carrier does, however, see Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 8.4 as providing a "hint" that some sectarian Christians may have doubted Jesus' historicity. See Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 350.
22. As Maurice Goguel rightly noted:

The question discussed by the Docetists was not whether there had lived a man in the time of Pilate named Jesus, who acted, suffered and died, but the problem was to determine the nature of His manifestation. (Maurice Goguel, *Jesus the Nazarene: Myth or History?*, trans. Frederick Stephens [London: Unwin, 1926], 90)

The literature on docetism is extensive but see Joseph Verheyden et al., eds., *Docetism in the Early Church: The Quest for an Elusive Phenomenon* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018).

23. See above, footnote 13.
24. Shirley Jackson Case, "Is Jesus a Historical Character?: Evidence for an Affirmative Opinion," *The American Journal of Theology* 15.2 (1911): 205–27, <https://doi.org/10.1086/478997>; Case, "Jesus' Historicity: A Statement of the Problem," *The American Journal of Theology* 15.2 (1911): 265–68, <https://doi.org/10.1086/479002>; Case, *The Historicity of Jesus* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1912); Case, "The Historicity of Jesus: An Estimate of the Negative Argument," *The American Journal of Theology* 15.1 (1911): 20–41, <https://doi.org/10.1086/478974>.
25. Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare, *The Historical Christ or an Investigation of the Views of Mr. J. M. Robertson, Dr. A. Drews, and Prof. W. B. Smith* (London: Watts & Co., 1914).
26. Goguel, *Jesus the Nazarene*.
27. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 124–42, 355–436.
28. Herbert George Wood, *Did Christ Really Live?* (London: SCM Press, 1938).
29. Walter P. Weaver, *The Historical Jesus in the Twentieth Century: 1900-1950* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 45–71.
30. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 6–17; Van Voorst, "Non-Existence Hypothesis," in *Jesus in History, Culture and Thought: An Encyclopedia*, ed. J. L. Houlden (Oxford: ABC-Clío, 2003), 658–60.
31. Kersey Graves, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors, or, Christianity before Christ*, 4th ed. (Boston, MA: Colby, Rich, 1876).
32. Acharya S, *Christ in Egypt: The Horus-Jesus Connection* (Seattle, WA: Stellar House Publishing, 2009); Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (Kempston, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1999); Acharya S, *Was There a Historical Jesus of Nazareth?: The Use of Midrash to Create a Biographical Detail in the Gospel Story* (Seattle, WA: Stellar House Publishing, 2014); Acharya S, *Who Was Jesus? Fingerprints of the Christ* (Seattle, WA: Stellar House Publishing, 2007). Acharya S. was the pen name of Dorothy Milne Murdock.
33. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 30.
34. For example, Wells, "The Historicity of Jesus," 27.
35. Some have also changed their thinking. There are, for example, considerable differences between subsequent editions of Arthur Drews, *Die Christusmythe* (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1909). See also Wells, *Cutting Jesus*, 329.

36. What follows is indebted to the useful summary found in Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 30–34.
37. The key non-Christian witnesses to Jesus' historicity that are the subject of debate are: Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae* 18.63–64, 20.200–201; Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4; Tacitus, *Annales* 15.44.2–4; Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 10.96; Lucian, *De morte Peregrini* 11, 13. See Robert E. Van Voorst, "Jesus Tradition in Classical and Jewish Writings," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2149–80.
38. Although this may not be strictly necessary. See K. L. Noll, "Investigating Earliest Christianity without Jesus," in *"Is This Not the Carpenter?": The Question of the Historicity of the Figure of Jesus*, ed. Thomas L. Thompson and Thomas S. Verenna (London: Equinox, 2012), 233–66.
39. Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy*; Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries: Was the Original Jesus A Pagan God?*, 2nd ed. (London: Thorsons, 2000); Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*.
40. Brodie, *Beyond the Quest*, 185.
41. For example, Joseph Atwill, *Caesar's Messiah: The Roman Conspiracy to Invent Jesus* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2005).
42. For example, Brodie, *Beyond the Quest*, 185.
43. Edwin Johnson was a professor of Classical Literature at New College, London. His initial, relatively sober, critique of early Christianity, *Antiqua Mater: A Study of Christian Origins*, published in 1887, advocated the non-existence of Jesus, but was followed by other, more adventurous works, including *The Pauline Epistles: Re-Studied and Explained* (1896), a book that dated the Pauline epistles and the gospels to the 1500s. See Edwin Johnson, *Antiqua Mater: A Study of Christian Origins* (London: Trübner, 1887); Johnson, *The Pauline Epistles: Re-Studied and Explained* (London: Watts & Co., 1896).
44. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 52–53.
45. It is important to note that this label is not one that is necessarily accepted by proponents of this position. Price, for example, has argued that he would prefer the position to be called "New Testament Minimalism", stressing, as he sees it, the continuity with an approach found in the Hebrew Bible scholarship of Thomas L. Thompson, Philip L. Davies and others. See Robert M. Price, "Introduction: Surprised by Myth," in *Bart Ehrman and the Quest of the Historical Jesus of Nazareth*, ed. Frank R. Zindler and Robert M.

Price (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2013), xvii.

46. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 3. See, for example, Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 4.
47. There are exceptions. Harpur, for example, does dedicate a chapter in *The Pagan Christ* to the term. See Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*, 15–26. However, his understanding of myth is indebted to that of Joseph Campbell, whose work is popular but problematic. See Robert Alan Segal, “Joseph Campbell’s Theory of Myth: An Essay Review of His Oeuvre,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46.1 (1978): 97–114, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/XLVI.1.67>.
48. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 3.
49. Robert Alan Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 5.
50. For the importance of lay definitions in the study of religion, see Steve Bruce, “Defining Religion: A Practical Response,” *International Review of Sociology: Revue Internationale de Sociologie* 21.1 (2011): 107–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2011.544190>.
51. See, for example, Dexter E. Callender, ed., *Myth and Scripture: Contemporary Perspectives on Religion, Language, and Imagination* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014). It is perhaps all the more surprising given how significant debates about myth have been in the study of the New Testament, most famously provoked by Rudolf Bultmann’s project of demythologisation. See Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. S. M. Ogden (London: SCM Press, 1985). Or, more recently, the work of Burton Mack, notably *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1988); Mack, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic and Legacy* (London: Continuum, 2001).
52. For example, Robert Ellwood, *Myth: Key Concepts in Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008); Lauri Honko, “The Problem of Defining Myth,” *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 6 (1972): 7–19; Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Robert Alan Segal, ed., *Myth: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 2007); Segal, *Theorizing about Myth* (Amherst, MA: University Massachusetts Press, 1999).
53. See Justin J. Meggitt, “Popular Mythology in the Early Empire and the Multiplicity of Jesus Traditions,” in *Sources of the Jesus Tradition: Separating History from Myth*, ed. R. Joseph Hoffmann (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2010), 53–80.

54. Paul Hamilton, *Historicism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 2.
55. The use of the term by mythicists does have a long pedigree. See, for example, William Benjamin Smith, *Ecce Deus: Studies of Primitive Christianity* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1913), 329–32.
56. Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument*, 10–41; Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 14–19; Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 6–17; Weaver, *The Historical Jesus*, 45–71.
57. Case, “The Historicity of Jesus: An Estimate of the Negative Argument,” 32–61; Arthur Drews, *Die Leugnung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1926); Goguel, *Jesus the Nazarene*, 1–28; Archibald Robertson, *Jesus: Myth or History?* (London: Watts & Co., 1946), 41–92; Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 124–42, 355–436; Wood, *Did Christ Really Live?*, 18–28. It is important to note the importance of the second German edition of Schweitzer's work in this respect. See James Carleton Paget, “Albert Schweitzer's Second Edition of the Quest of the Historical Jesus,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 88.1 (2006): 3–39, <https://doi.org/10.7227/BJRL.88.1.1>.
58. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 10. Studies of the “Radical Dutch School” are lacking. However, see Gustaaf Adolf van den Bergh van Eysinga, *Radical Views about the New Testament*, trans. Samuel Benjamin Slack (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1912); Hermann Detering, “The Dutch Radical Approach to the Pauline Epistles,” *Journal of Higher Criticism* 3.2 (1996): 163–93.
59. J. M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology* (London: Watts & co., 1900); Robertson, *Pagan Christs: Studies in Comparative Hierology* (London: Watts & Co., 1903); Robertson, *The Historical Jesus: A Survey of Positions* (London: Watts & co., 1916).
60. William Benjamin Smith, *Der vorchristliche Jesus* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1906); Smith, *Ecce Deus*.
61. Albert Kalthoff, *Das Christus-Problem. Grundlinien zu einer Sozialtheologie* (Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1902); Kalthoff, *Was wissen wir von Jesus? Eine Abrechnung mit W. Bousset*. (Berlin: Renaissance-Otto Lehrman, 1904).
62. Peter Jensen, *Hat der Jesus der Evangelien wirklich gelebt?: eine Antwort an Prof. Dr. Jülicher* (Frankfurt am Main: Neuer Frankfurter, 1910).
63. Drews, *Die Christusmythe*.
64. Paul-Louis Couchoud, *Jésus: le dieu fait homme* (Paris: Rieder et Cie, 1937); Couchoud, *Le mystère de Jésus* (Paris: Rieder et Cie, 1924).

65. Kuhn was a prolific author producing over 150 works. Those denying the historicity of Jesus include: Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *Shadow of the Third Century: A Revaluation of Christianity* (Elizabeth, NJ: Academy Press, 1949); Kuhn, *Who Is This King of Glory?: A Critical Study of the Christos-Messiah Tradition* (Elizabeth, NJ: Academy Press, 1944).
66. Charles François Dupuis, *Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle* (Paris: H. Agasse, 1795); Constantin-François Volney, *Les ruines ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires* (Paris: Desenne, 1791). Despite publishing earlier, Volney was heavily dependent upon a manuscript version of Dupuis. See George A. Wells, "Stages of New Testament Criticism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30.2 (1969): 147–60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2708429>.
67. Massey published widely but his views on the historical Jesus can be seen in Gerald Massey, *The Historical Jesus and Mythical Christ* (Glasgow: Hay Nisbet & Co., 1887); Massey, *The Natural Genesis* (London: Williams, Norgate, 1883), 2:378–503.
68. Notably Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*. For a critique of his use of Massey, see Porter and Bedard, *Unmasking the Pagan Christ*, 25–31.
69. There are some surprising omissions in most accounts. The work of Robert Taylor is usually ignored, as is that of John Allegro, the Dead Sea Scrolls scholar. See John Marco Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970); Robert Taylor, *The Diegesis: Being a Discovery of the Origin, Evidences, and Early History of Christianity* (London: R. Carlile, J. Brooks, 1829).
70. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 13.
71. Fernando Bermejo-Rubio, "The Fiction of the 'Three Quests': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Historiographical Paradigm," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 7.3 (2009): 211, <https://doi.org/10.1163/147686909X12497389140507>.
72. Bermejo-Rubio, "The Fiction of the 'Three Quests,'" 247.
73. See, for example, Edythe C. Haber, "The Mythic Bulgakov: The Master and Margarita and Arthur Drews's *The Christ Myth*," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 43.2 (1999): 347–60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/309549>; Iosif Aronovič Kryvelev, *Christ: Myth or Reality?* (Moscow: Editorial Board Social Sciences Today, 1987). The work of the journalist Rudolf Augstein also had a considerable impact in Germany. See Rudolf Augstein, *Jesus Menschensohn* (München:

- Bertelsmann, 1972).
74. Goguel, *Jesus the Nazarene*, 53.
 75. Brodie, *Beyond the Quest*, 117.
 76. See F. Stanley Jones, ed., "The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity: From Toland to Baur" (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2012).
 77. In my judgement, probably Herbert of Cherbury.
 78. Edward Stillingfleet, *A Letter to a Deist, in Answer to Several Objections against the Truth and Authority of the Scriptures* (London: W. G., 1677), 53–54.
 79. Voltaire, *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Paris: De L'Imprimerie de la Société Littéraire-Typographique, 1784), 33:273. Although Voltaire also believed that the New Testament was riddled with contradictions, and a "derivative compound" of pre-Christian myths, he rejected their position on two grounds: (i) the fact that people wrote for and against Jesus indicates he existed; (ii) none of the early opponents of Christianity ever doubted his existence. See John Marshall, "Voltaire, Priestcraft and Imposture: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam," *Intellectual History Review* 28.1 (2018): 168, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2018.1402446>.
 80. George Berkeley, *Alciphron or, the Minute Philosopher* (Dublin: G. Risk, G. Ewing, W. Smith, 1732), 1:10.
 81. Berkeley, *Alciphron or, the Minute Philosopher.*, 1:13.
 82. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Strahan, Cadell, 1776), 1:309 n. 63. A similar intent is evident, for example, in Charles Blount, *The Two First Books of Philostratus, Concerning the Life of Apollonius Tyaneus* (London: Nathaniel Thompson, 1680).
 83. John Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule & Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).
 84. James A. Herrick, *The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists: The Discourse of Skepticism, 1680–1750* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 85.
 85. Thomas Woolston, *A Fourth Discourse on the Miracles of Our Saviour*, 2nd ed. (London: Thomas Woolston, 1728), 28. For Woolston's hermeneutics, see James A. Herrick, "Blasphemy in the Eighteenth Century: Contours of a Rhetorical Crime," in *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650–1800*, ed. Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, and Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth (London: Routledge, 2014), 104–8.

86. Herrick, "Blasphemy in the Eighteenth Century," 106. Later deists would be more blunt. Thomas Paine, for example, asserted: "[Jesus] did not even exist as a man, he is merely an imaginary or allegorical character, as Apollo, Hercules, Jupiter and all the deities of antiquity were." Thomas Paine, *Examination of the Passages in the New Testament, Quoted from the Old, and Called Prophecies Concerning Jesus Christ* (New York, NY: Author, 1807), 48.
87. Anon., "Historical and Critical Reflections on Mahometanism and Socinianism," in *Four Treatises Concerning the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Mahometans*, ed. Anon. (London: B. Lintott, 1712), 197. These classical references to Jesus were regarded as the work of "neutrals" in religious polemic of the seventeenth century. See, for example, Jean D'Espagne, *The Joyfull Convert: Represented in a Short but Elegant Sermon Preached at the Baptizing of a Turke, Who Renouncing the Law of Mahomet, and Having given Abundant Satisfaction for the Reasons and Soundness of His Conversion, Was Baptized in the French Church May 2 1658* (London: I. Leach, 1658), 12. As a result, such accusations of interpolation were, as today, especially significant for arguments over Jesus' historicity.
88. N. T. Wright, "Jesus' Self-Understanding," in *The Incarnation*, ed. S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 48. See also Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 13.
89. Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 251; Powell, *The Jesus Debate: Modern Historians Investigate the Life of Christ* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 180. See, for example, Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 5.
90. See, for example, Frank R. Zindler and Robert M. Price, eds., *Bart Ehrman and the Quest of the Historical Jesus of Nazareth* (Cranford NJ: American Atheist Press, 2013).
91. Frank R. Zindler, *Through Atheist Eyes: Scenes from a World That Won't Reason. Volume I: Religions & Scriptures* (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press, 2011).
92. It is important to note that not all are. Drews was, for example, a monist. See George S. Williamson, "The Christ Myth Debate: Radical Theology and German Public Life, 1909-1913," *Church History* 86.3 (2017): 728-64, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0009640717001299>. Brodie is a theist.

93. Indeed, some of the most significant contributions to the Christ-myth debate have, in the British context, been published by the Rationalist Press Association (through its publisher Watts & Co.). Interestingly, Conybeare's *The Historical Christ*, an attack on mythicism, was also published by that press. For Conybeare, an Oxford biblical scholar and rationalist, his work provided "a middle way between traditionalism on the one hand and absurdity on the other". Conybeare, *The Historical Christ*, vii. See Bill Cooke, *The Gathering of Infidels: A Hundred Years of the Rationalist Press Association* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 50–52.
94. See J. Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 4.
95. For example, Raymond W. Bernard, *Apollonius of Tyana the Nazarene* (Mokelumne Hill, CA: Health Research, 1964); Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy*. A strain in contemporary white supremacism also believes the historical Jesus was the product of a conspiracy. See, for example, Ben Klassen, *A Revolution of Values through Religion* (Otto, NC: Creativity, 1991).
96. For example, J. M. Robertson, *The Baconian Heresy: A Confutation* (London: H. Jenkins, 1913).
97. See Justin J. Meggitt, "The Madness of King Jesus: Why Was Jesus Put To Death, but His Followers Were Not?," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29.4 (2007): 379–413, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X07078990>.
98. For example, Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument*, 43–59.
99. Carrier, *Proving History*. See also Raphael Lataster, "Questioning the Plausibility of Jesus Ahistoricity Theories—a Brief Pseudo-Bayesian Metacritique of the Sources," *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 6.1 (2015): 63–96.
100. For example, Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 5–7, 338.
101. For example, Raphael Lataster and Richard Carrier, *Jesus Did Not Exist: A Debate among Atheists* (Scotts Valley, CA: Raphael C. Lataster, 2015).
102. Goguel, *Jesus the Nazarene*, 45.
103. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 6–7.
104. For example, Michael R. Licona, "Historians and Miracle Claims," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 12.1 (2014): 106–29, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455197-01202002>.
105. Vinayak Chaturvedi, ed., *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the*

Postcolonial (London: Verso, 2012); Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What Is Microhistory?: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013); Andrew I. Port, "History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. James Wright, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 108–13.

106. See, for example, Robert C. Knapp, *Invisible Romans: Prostitutes, Outlaws, Slaves, Gladiators, Ordinary Men and Women ... The Romans That History Forgot* (London: Profile Books, 2011); Justin J. Meggitt, "Sources: Use, Abuse and Neglect: The Importance of Ancient Popular Culture.," in *Christianity at Corinth: The Scholarly Quest for the Corinthian Church*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 241–53.
107. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 12.
108. See the remarks of Casey in *Jesus: Evidence and Argument*, 9 concerning Earl Doherty, *Jesus: Neither God nor Man — the Case for a Mythical Jesus*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: Age of Reason, 2009).
109. For example, Byrskog, "Historicity of Jesus," 2183, n. 1; Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History*, 251.
110. Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 21.
111. Casey, *Jesus: Evidence and Argument*, 4–5.
112. Brodie's religious order has now prohibited him from writing anything further. See Bernard Treacy, "Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Official Dominican Response to a Controversial Book," *Doctrine and Life* 64 (2014): 2–4.
113. Weaver, *The Historical Jesus*, 71.
114. Earlier versions of this paper were delivered at seminars in the universities of Cambridge, Durham and Stockholm, as well as at the British New Testament Conference. I would like to thank participants for their constructive feedback and encouragement.

CHAPTER 7.

DID MAGIC MATTER? THE SALIENCY OF MAGIC IN THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE

INTRODUCTION: THE UBIQUITY OF MAGIC?

It is usually assumed that belief in magic was ubiquitous in the early Roman empire,¹ that, in the words of Pliny the Elder, “there is no one who does not fear to be spellbound by curse tablets”.² One needs only read the accounts of the famous trials for sorcery of Apollonius of Tyana³ and Apuleius of Madaura,⁴ or the magical explanations given for the untimely demise of Germanicus, Tiberius’ popular heir,⁵ to see how significant magic appears to have been. Indeed, the only fully extant novel in Latin that we possess,⁶ Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, is concerned with the consequences⁷ of meddling in such things.⁸ Homer’s *Odyssey*, one of the formative texts for most of the inhabitants of the empire,⁹ could be thought to be “composed of nothing else”.¹⁰ There are also a number of practical magical writings that seem to confirm much the same picture, including not just those that constitute the well-known *Papyri Graecae Magicae*¹¹ but such works as the amulet grimoire of Cyranides¹² or the *Testament of Solomon* — a handbook for controlling demons potentially responsible for everything from migraine to death.¹³ Early Christian literature, such as the canonical *Acts of the Apostles*¹⁴ and the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*,¹⁵ depict an empire preoccupied by magic, a world in which those spreading the new faith are forced to battle with magicians¹⁶ and magical books are burnt in public by those that they convert.¹⁷

The material culture of the empire likewise seems to provide copious, tangible evidence of the vitality of belief in magic. Artefacts, such as the myriad of *defixiones* (binding spells),¹⁸ incantation bowls,¹⁹ “voodoo” dolls,²⁰ magical *lamellae* and amulets,²¹ brought together in the extensive collections by the likes of Campbell Bonner, John Gager, Roy Kotansky, Simone Michel, Daniel Ogden, and Hanna Philipp,²² appear compelling evidence of magic’s significant place in the lives of most of its inhabitants.²³ And we could easily go on: from the presence of the paradigmatic witches Circe and Medea on Roman oil lamps, gemstones, murals and sarcophagi,²⁴ to the plethora of apotropaic representations of the evil eye found on everything from mosaics and amulets to ear-rings,²⁵ the salience of magic in the Roman Empire seems to be anything but illusory. Even epitaphs appear to bear witness to its importance. Here, for example, is one from Rome itself which dates from the 20s CE:

Iucundus, the slave of Livia the wife of Drusus Caesar, son of Gryphus and Vitalis. As I grew towards my fourth year I was seized and killed, when I had the potential to be sweet for my mother and father. I was snatched by a witch’s hand, ever cruel so long as it remains on the earth and does harm with its craft. Parents, guard your children well, lest grief of this magnitude should implant itself on your breast.²⁶

Indeed, the moral and legal prohibitions placed upon magic,²⁷ not least the fact that the practice of magic was deemed a capital offence in Roman law,²⁸ combined with its prominence in early Christian heresiological literature, where it functioned “as the discourse of alterity par excellence”,²⁹ appears to confirm that magic was indeed a dynamic and potent force in early imperial culture. It is, perhaps, so hard to resist the intrinsic allure of an amulet depicting an anguipede, cockerel-headed Abrasax,³⁰ or Solomon, on horseback, spearing a demon,³¹ that to conclude otherwise seems unimaginable.³² In the face of the data we have

just surveyed it could be judged perverse not to agree with Hans Dieter Betz that “Magical beliefs and practices can hardly be overestimated in their importance for the daily lives of the people.”³³

However, the picture just drawn at best only indicates the *presence* of ideas about magic and magical practices of some kind, and we need to determine a defensible definition of magic before we can say even this with any confidence. Gauging the character and prevalence of magic requires a more sustained and rigorous analysis of sources that shed light on the early Roman empire, and one that, importantly, attends not just to the apparent *presence* of magic but its *absence* too. We need to note not just where it appears but also, tellingly, where it does not. Before we address these two elements of our analysis, let us begin, however, with the question of the definition of the term “magic”, something that is necessary if what follows is to have any value.

NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T: DEFINING MAGIC

Although “magic” at least has the advantage of being a “native category of thought” for those who lived in the Roman empire,³⁴ something that is not necessarily the case for the inhabitants of other cultures in the past and the present,³⁵ what exactly constituted “magic” for them is far from self-evident. To eschew a definition of “magic”, as some classical scholars do,³⁶ is not advisable because it tends to result in the conflation of “magic” with a variety of other things that might strike some modern scholars as manifestly magical but were, in fact, everyday and uncontroversial elements of religious life in the empire and not considered such by any of its inhabitants.³⁷ For example, divination, the attempt to determine the will of the gods and the likely outcome of future events, was not in itself something that would be judged magical by those living in the early Roman

empire. It was not only ubiquitous³⁸ but was a central part of most religions in antiquity,³⁹ and especially the religious life of the Romans.⁴⁰ It is not, for example, helpful to label the activities of *haruspices*, many of whom were key religious officiants in the public cults of the empire, as practitioners of “oracular magic”, as some have done.⁴¹ Such divination did not constitute magic but a respected and necessary religious act,⁴² something undertaken, for instance, after most public sacrifices.⁴³ The same could be said of amulets or, indeed, incantations, the use of neither of which was thought in itself to be magical. For example, every freeborn male, before reaching maturity, wore a *bullā*, a locket hung around the neck, as an apotropaic device, often containing a representation of a phallus, but none would have considered such a thing magical.⁴⁴ Similarly, incantations were not necessarily magical activities to Romans; their use in the healing of fractures was, for example, recommended by no less a figure than Cato the Elder⁴⁵ and clearly considered by such a respectable authority to be quite distinct from magical practices proscribed under Roman law.⁴⁶

Failing to provide a definition of magic can also lead many to inadvertently miscategorise some data, to see magic where it was patently not thought to be. For example, invocations of gods other than the Olympic pantheon and closely associated deities have often been seen as “magical” because of a historical tendency within the field to protect a dominant but narrow understanding of classical religion, to fall victim to what has been termed “Classicism”.⁴⁷ So, as Attilio Mastrocinque has demonstrated, the cult of the Askalon Asklepios has often been labelled “magical” out of ignorance of the iconography of a cult which was regarded as a local manifestation of one of the most widely dispersed and supported of all the cults in the empire, second only in significance, perhaps, to the imperial cult itself.⁴⁸

However, avoiding a definition is perhaps understandable, if

not entirely forgivable. Sarah Iles Johnston is surely right to observe that:

Endless theorizing about how magic was or was not different from religion (or anything else) had stalled our progress toward examining and understanding some fascinating ancient material.⁴⁹

And there is good reason to sympathise with Matthew Dickie's "dismay combined with a sense of foreboding"⁵⁰ upon encountering yet another attempt to define magic. The literature can be quite overwhelming, not least because within anthropology, the field in which most contemporary thinking on the subject of magic has taken place, magic has been "at its epistemological centre"⁵¹ since its inception, and continues to generate extensive debate.⁵²

There are well-known strengths and weaknesses to the different kinds of definition of magic that have been proffered,⁵³ however we categorise these, whether the definitions could be said, for example, to be essentialist,⁵⁴ functionalist,⁵⁵ locative-relational,⁵⁶ evolutionary,⁵⁷ developmental,⁵⁸ intellectualist,⁵⁹ instrumentalist,⁶⁰ linguistic,⁶¹ performative,⁶² emotionalist,⁶³ existential,⁶⁴ phenomenological,⁶⁵ mythopoetic,⁶⁶ or sensory.⁶⁷ For example, essentialist or substantivist definitions of magic have proved notoriously problematic. "Magic" and "religion" cannot be easily distinguished by differences between them in, for instance, intention, attitude, action, or social and moral evaluation,⁶⁸ nor even, as Jonathan Z. Smith has suggested, scale;⁶⁹ no criterion is effective in making a clear distinction between the two.⁷⁰ Functionalist definitions of magic suffer from the failing common to functionalist definitions more generally: they tend, in practice, to be dependent upon an implicit, substantive definition of something to which a function is ascribed.⁷¹ They are also often procrustean, indeed many radically so, only capturing one aspect of a phenomenon in their

definition, effectively amputating a great deal that is vital, and sacrificing “historical context in favor of taxonomic purity”.⁷² For example, it seems unlikely that magic should be viewed solely as a response to risk, something that is found wherever there is “a hiatus in knowledge or practical control”, as Bronislaw Malinowski maintained.⁷³ Such an understanding is impossible to square with ethnographic data⁷⁴ and does not do justice to the range of motivations, emotions and practices most cultures associate with magic. Those who have argued that magic is a locative or relational category, something that, for example, distinguishes between those labelling and those labelled,⁷⁵ to designate a form of deviance against which a dominant discourse defines itself,⁷⁶ have to deal with the problem that such definitions are, at best, once again, only partial. The association of magic with specific subjects, places, practices and practitioners (some of whom may even self-identify as magicians) indicate that there is more to magic than *just* a way of creating and condemning alterity.⁷⁷ Within some cultures, including those in antiquity, magic clearly has an identifiable, agreed — if contestable — existence; it had a presence that was more tangible than mere rhetoric,⁷⁸ and was not necessarily understood in relation to central, sanctioned and normative forms of religious life and practice.⁷⁹ And considerably more could, of course, be said.

The business of definition has not been helped by the inconsistency of some major contributors within the field. For example, as Ronald Hutton has noted, although Dickie eschews essentialist definitions of magic in his comprehensive and influential *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, by the final third of his work he regularly uses the term in just such a manner.⁸⁰ It has also not helped that some major theorists, such as Max Weber, though they regularly discussed magic, and had

a substantial impact on subsequent definitional debates, never themselves attempted to define it.⁸¹

Given the failure of scholarship to arrive at an agreed definition, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown famously suggested that there should be a moratorium on the use of the term “magic”.⁸² However, this is not a way out of the impasse. In practice, it has just resulted in a proliferation of unhelpful circumlocutions, or forced and ungainly synonyms. For example, some scholars of religion in antiquity refer to magic as “ritual power”,⁸³ a designation that fails to take seriously non-ritual aspects of the phenomenon they are attempting to study. It precludes, for instance, analysis of the evil eye which could be cast inadvertently without any recourse to ritual.⁸⁴ Where magic can reasonably be argued to be a native category, as is the case in the early Roman empire, such circumlocutions tend to obfuscate and hamper rather than aid analysis.

Rodney Stark is right to observe that, generally speaking, “the term magic has been a conceptual mess”,⁸⁵ and this is especially true amongst those concerned with the study of magic in antiquity. Even though we have near universal belief in its significance, we do not have anything approaching a consensus about what it is or how it should be studied; instead we have “a confusing spectrum of divergent theories”.⁸⁶ Indeed, recent debates amongst those who study magic in the ancient Mediterranean have “trodden what appeared to be a reasonable amount of scholarly common ground into a quagmire”.⁸⁷ However, things are not as intractable as they might appear. A definition of “magic”, for our purposes, need not be one that is ahistorical nor universally applicable. Though such definitions can be useful to “think with”, or said to be sensitising⁸⁸ — that is, they can assist us in scrutinising the phenomenon more carefully by helping us to ask questions about both the subject and our own analysis of it — they can also be misleading and are

unnecessary for interpreting imperial culture. All we require is a definition that fits this particular context. It does not need to extend to making some kind of sense of the world of the Azande, Trobriand Islanders or practitioners of contemporary Wicca.

However, deriving a definition that is rooted in first-century conceptualisations of magic is still a challenging task. Perhaps surprisingly, given that it carried a capital penalty,⁸⁹ “the Romans produced no precise definition of what magic was and what was not”.⁹⁰ Indeed, Apuleius raised the matter of definition when defending himself against the charge of witchcraft (an occasion when it was clearly of some consequence), asking a deceptively simple but devastating question of the lawyers representing his accuser: “I should therefore like to ask his most learned advocates how, precisely, they would define a magician?”⁹¹

Whatever definition we arrive at will, clearly, have its limitations, particularly given the range of different ethnic and regional cultures encompassed by the empire. Nonetheless, a definition derived from those things which can reasonably be assumed to have been considered magical by most people in the early Roman empire, largely, but not solely, indicated by the presence of a cluster of key Latin and Greek terms related to magical practitioners (Latin: *magus*, *lamia*, *saga*, *maleficus*, *praecantrix*, *veneficus*; Greek: μάγος, γόης, φάρμακος) and the practice of magic itself (Latin: *magica*, *veneficia*; Greek: μαγεία, γοητεία, φαρμακαεία), seems reasonable, even if, as the famous trial of Apuleius indicates, the meaning of such terms was both malleable and contestable.⁹² Such a definition could, in Ogden’s taxonomy, be termed “linguistic”.⁹³

However, I would also like to propose a definition that is *polythetic*,⁹⁴ to borrow a concept from a form of classification employed in biology, but also familiar in the study of religion in general as well as the study of religion in antiquity.⁹⁵ Such a form of definition allows it to reflect the multivalent interpretations

of magic in the early Roman empire. That is, the definition that follows is based upon a set of characteristic properties regarded as indicative of magic, many of which need to be present for us to identify its presence in our sources (and then undertake the business of gauging its saliency), though none of which is either sufficient or necessary. It is useful to think of those things that were identified as magic in antiquity as possessing what Ludwig Wittgenstein referred to as a “family resemblance”, something that allows considerable variety whilst also allowing for identifiable commonality.⁹⁶ The definition I would like to use is also one that is dependent, as far as it is possible, upon the *emic* perspective of inhabitants of the first century,⁹⁷ or better, given disagreements and differences over what exactly merited the label “magic”, as we can see in Apuleius’ trial, *emic perspectives* of inhabitants of the early Roman empire.⁹⁸

So, in brief, I believe it is both useful and legitimate to think of magic in the early Roman empire as something associated with characteristic:

(a) Practices. Magic was often thought to involve nocturnal and secret rites,⁹⁹ the use of incantations, spells and *voces magicae*,¹⁰⁰ as well as abnormal sacrifices, including the sacrifice of humans.¹⁰¹

(b) Practitioners. Although non-specialists could carry out magical acts,¹⁰² a range of identifiable experts were associated with the practice of magic, from sorcerers and magicians to witches and root-cutters.¹⁰³

(c) Places. Particular locations, especially those places connected with the dead and death, such as cemeteries, battlefields or places of execution,¹⁰⁴ and places that were secret or isolated, such as caves, ruins, or woods,¹⁰⁵ were regularly associated with magic.

(d) Times. Magic was especially associated with the night,¹⁰⁶ a full moon¹⁰⁷ or an eclipse.¹⁰⁸

(e) Materials and artefacts. Specific plants and gemstones, as well as animal and human body parts, were thought to be necessary for the practice of magic.¹⁰⁹ Certain objects, such as amulets, magical books, voodoo dolls, *lamellae* and *defixiones*, and knotted threads,¹¹⁰ were believed to be tools employed by those utilising it.

(f) Knowledge. Magic was usually thought to involve the possession and application of distinctive, specialist and secret knowledge. This could be of both a technical and propositional kind. In the case of the former, it could include such things as knowledge of specific rituals and practices, and, in the case of the latter, such things as knowledge of supernatural realms and their inhabitants, or the true natures of, and potential causal relationships between, animate and inanimate objects.¹¹¹

(g) Gods and spirits. Magic was particularly associated with infernal, chthonic gods of the underworld, especially Hecate,¹¹² and the spirits of the dead, especially the restless dead, those who had died too early, or too violently or who had not received the appropriate burial rites, or had been killed by magical practitioners themselves.¹¹³

(h) Effects. Magic was usually thought to be something that was harmful to at least one of the parties involved.¹¹⁴

There are other traits that regularly appear in depictions of magic that were prominent in the early Roman empire.¹¹⁵ Magic was, for example, regularly associated with particular geographical locations, such as Babylonia,¹¹⁶ Egypt¹¹⁷ or Thessaly,¹¹⁸ and cities such as Ephesus¹¹⁹ and Memphis,¹²⁰ or ethnic groups, both real and imagined, such as Chaldeans,¹²¹ Hyperboreans,¹²² Persians,¹²³ Egyptians,¹²⁴ Jews,¹²⁵ and the Marsi.¹²⁶ It was also usually deployed in specific agonistic contexts where the practitioner or client often had much to lose or gain, such as trade, law, sport and love.¹²⁷ It was sometimes spoken about in terms of compulsion, with the magician

assumed to have the power to be able to compel even a god to act against their will.¹²⁸ However, the key characteristics I have just adumbrated are a useful distillation of the central features of magic in the early Roman empire, at least for most of its inhabitants (there were, of course, variations within some groups, notably Jews, and later Christians, who, in addition to sharing many of these general notions about magic, tended to equate the religious practices of others with magic).¹²⁹

So, using our definition, perhaps unsurprisingly, the famous depiction of the witch Pamphile in Apulcius' *Metamorphoses* could be said to contain (a) Practices, (b) Practitioners, (d) Times, and (e) Materials and Artefacts, that to inhabitants of the early Roman empire were characteristic of magic:

As night began ... she arranged her deadly laboratory with its customary apparatus, setting out spices of all sorts, unintelligibly lettered metal plaques, the surviving remains of ill-omened birds, and numerous pieces of mourned and even buried corpses: here noses and fingers, there flesh-covered spikes from crucified bodies, elsewhere the preserved gore of murder victims and mutilated skulls wrenched from the teeth of wild beasts. Then she recited a charm over some pulsating entrails and made offerings with various liquids Next she bound and knotted those hairs together in interlocking braids and put them to burn on live coals along with several kinds of incense.¹³⁰

Similarly, the description of events surrounding the death of Germanicus, as recounted by Tacitus, has (a) Practices, (c) Places, (e) Materials and Artefacts, (g) Gods and spirits, and (h) Effects, associated with magic by most in Graeco-Roman culture:

Explorations in the floor and walls [of the building in which Germanicus died] brought to light the remains of human bodies, spells, curses, leaden tablets engraved with the name Germanicus, charred and blood-smeared ashes, and others of the implements by which it is believed the living soul can be devoted to the powers of the infernal deities.¹³¹

However, using our definition, the much-discussed Isis theophany that is central to the climax of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*¹³² and which leads to the protagonist's return to human form, would not be considered an example of "magic" because it fails to possess any of its possible characteristics (other than it taking place at full moon, a time which, in any case, had specific non-magical associations for worshippers of Isis).¹³³ Whilst modern commentators, such as Stavros Frangoulidis, are entitled to label it magical,¹³⁴ depending upon what kind of definition of magic they are employing,¹³⁵ such a designation would have made little sense to its original readers.

Certainly, if we look at the implied definition of magic found in Roman legislation, our operational, polythetic definition appears congruent with what is assumed there. Sulla's *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* of 81 BCE, the chief law relating to magic that was in force in the early Roman empire,¹³⁶ contains all of the elements of our definition (with the exception of a clear reference to characteristic (b) Place). Although we do not have the text of the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* itself, this can be seen in excerpts from Pseudo-Paulus' famous commentary on this law:

15. Those who perform, or arrange for the performance of, impious or nocturnal rites, in order to enchant, transfix, or bind someone, shall either be crucified or thrown to the beasts.

16. Those who sacrifice a man or obtain omens from his blood, or pollute a shrine or a temple, shall be thrown to the beasts or, if *honestiores*,¹³⁷ be punished capitally.

17. It is agreed that those guilty of the magic art be inflicted with the supreme punishment, i.e., be thrown to the beasts or crucified. Actual magicians, however, shall be burned alive.

18. No one is permitted to have in their possession books of the magic art; anyone in whose possession they are found shall have

their property confiscated, and the books publicly burnt, and they themselves shall be deported to an island; *humiliores* shall be punished capitally. Not only is the profession of this art but also the knowledge prohibited.¹³⁸

Of course, there was another side to magic in the Roman empire to that which we have discussed so far. For some, there was a respectable and venerable form of magic. So Apuleius, for example, initially defended himself against the accusation of sorcery by confirming that he was happy to be called a *magus* — as long as it was understood that by this he meant someone in the line of the ancient Persian *magi*,¹³⁹ priests of Zoroaster who were considered especially skilled in such things as oneirology, astrology, and additional forms of divination, including the ability to undertake otherworldly journeys.¹⁴⁰ And this was clearly distinguishable from the corrupt form that was popularly thought to be “magic”. As Calasiris, an Egyptian priest in Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica* declared:

Of our wisdom there is one kind that is common and — as I may term it — creeps on the ground, which is concerned with ghosts and occupied about dead bodies, using herbs and addicted to enchantments, neither tending itself nor bringing such as use it to any good end The other, my son, which is the true wisdom, from whence the counterfeit has degenerated.¹⁴¹

In the light of such material it might appear useful to speak of a variety of *magics* co-existing in the Roman empire, as Richard Gordon has suggested.¹⁴² Indeed, forms of magic developed and changed over the centuries, and it is possible to see the increasing elaboration of practice from relatively simple Greek techniques of the classical period to the involved esoteric forms that are more common in the empire (evidenced in the increasing complexity of curse tablets and the growing popularity of a new genre of *physica*, works such as that of Cyranides that detail the occult forces of nature).¹⁴³ If we accept Fritz Graf’s analysis, we

can see a shift from an essentially *instrumental* interest in magic to an *epistemological* fascination with what knowledge it might be able to provide about the supreme God. The latter was especially manifest in the various *Hermetica* that flourished from the mid-second century CE¹⁴⁴ and the theurgy of the Iamblichus that became prominent in the third,¹⁴⁵ though it might also have been present in the possible neo-Pythagorean revival associated with Nigidius Figulus which appeared in the late Republic.¹⁴⁶ However, whilst it is certainly important to note rarefied discourses of magic, and, indeed, different regional and ethnic traditions and emphases, this should not preclude us from identifying and scrutinising the significance of what most people judged to be magic, of making judgements on the saliency of something that constituted the generally held, shared culture of the empire. Our definition is one that reflects the dominant and most widespread understanding of magic in the early Roman empire, the kind that Calasiris calls “common”; a kind of magic identified by most commentators as taking a surprisingly similar form across the empire by at least the second century CE,¹⁴⁷ though present in most forms of Graeco-Roman culture sometime before that.

JUST AN ILLUSION? EVALUATING EVIDENCE FOR THE PRESENCE OF MAGIC

Before we evaluate the evidence for magic in the early Roman empire, we need to begin by abandoning the fundamental assumption of many working in the field, or dependent upon work in this field, that magic must, of necessity, have been significant because the Roman empire was a pre-modern culture. In approaching the empire and its inhabitants we need to do something analogous to that which Mary Douglas, some decades ago, advocated anthropologists should do, and “ditch the myth of the pious primitive”.¹⁴⁸ We need to be aware that the salience of

magic needs to be proven rather than assumed, however much some may have invested in the subject. Magic was not necessarily a constant or significant feature of all pre-modern societies, and we should not presume that it must have been for the inhabitants of the early Roman empire.¹⁴⁹

Indeed, when we look at the evidence rather more closely, some perplexing things emerge and reasons for believing that magic was a significant element of early imperial culture and the day-to-day lives of its inhabitants appear less compelling. For example, the interest in magic in literary sources is a far from unproblematic indication of its saliency. Despite its centrality, Homer's representation of magic is actually somewhat ambivalent and cannot be presumed to have contributed to its alleged importance in the empire. As well as providing the paradigmatic literary representations of magic, in the depiction of figures such as Circe¹⁵⁰ and Calypso,¹⁵¹ Homer was also capable of demonstrating a sustained disinterest in it,¹⁵² something that did not escape the attention of his readers: whilst the *Odyssey* is replete with references to magic,¹⁵³ there is, as Pliny the Elder observed, no mention of it at all in the *Iliad*.¹⁵⁴ The engaging depictions of magic by the likes of Apuleius, Lucian and Petronius,¹⁵⁵ with their accounts of such things as haunted houses and human sacrifice, are heavily stylised and formulaic and, as Graham Anderson has argued, reminiscent of folktales or better *fairytale*s that predate these texts.¹⁵⁶ Such works tell us that stories about magic were considered entertaining and had an audience, but little else. Magic might "matter" but not in the sense that is usually assumed: the inhabitants of the early Roman empire could well be like the Dani of Papua New Guinea who show "more fear of ghosts in stories than they do in their everyday activities."¹⁵⁷

The reservations we have about the value of literary works as evidence for the widespread significance of magic in the early

Roman empire should also extend to legal sources too. The existence of laws aimed specifically against magical practices and practitioners, such as the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis*, do not, in themselves, tell us much about the saliency of magic in the empire. Such laws do not necessarily reflect the sustained assumptions and anxieties of the wider cultures within which they operate. Indeed, laws against magic are often the residue of short-lived moral panics.¹⁵⁸ In this sense, laws like the *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* (and the earlier laws from which it was constituted),¹⁵⁹ may well be similar to such things as the *Garrotter's Act* of 1863, which remained on the statute books in England and Wales for almost a century, and was a legal response to the sudden appearance of foreign stranglers who, albeit briefly, gripped the imagination though not the throats, of Victorian Londoners.¹⁶⁰

Indeed, the limited number of prosecutions for witchcraft in the early Roman empire supports such an interpretation of the nature of such legislation and, in itself, is indicative of a general lack of interest in magic. Few people were tried and even less executed for magic in the empire (nor is there evidence of the extra-judicial or *de facto* killing of magical practitioners). Relative to the population of the empire as a whole, the numbers put to death appear to have been extremely small, and when judged against practices in other cultures, strikingly so. For example, although the data is not entirely unproblematic and cross-cultural comparisons can be invidious, the number of witches executed in only two years in the English region of East Anglia between 1645 and 1647 appears to be roughly comparable to the total number executed in the first few centuries of the Roman empire¹⁶¹ — and the former had a population of less than one per cent of the latter.¹⁶²

There is also a famous paradox, well known in antiquity, evident in the actions of those that did bring prosecutions against

magical practitioners, which makes it difficult to believe that they really credited magic with the kind of power that is often assumed: as Apollonius of Tyana allegedly remarked, “If you think me a sorcerer, how will you chain me? And if you chain me, how will you think me a sorcerer?”¹⁶³ Indeed, not only would it be impossible to punish someone who had such power but, as Apuleius pointed out in his own defence, it would also be suicidal: “the man who believes in the truth of such a charge as this is certainly the last person in the world who should bring such an accusation.”¹⁶⁴

The material culture associated with magic which can be dated to the early Roman empire is also a far from reliable indicator of the ubiquity of assumptions about its efficacy even though it is tempting to interpret such evidence in this way.¹⁶⁵ Of course, many artefacts associated with magic are, by their nature, ephemeral and unlikely to leave much of an impression on the archaeological record — one thinks, for example, of the magical threads that were used as charms or to effect binding spells¹⁶⁶ — but magical artefacts, or references to them, are surprisingly thin on the ground. For example, no objects that Romans would have considered unequivocally magical were discovered at Pompeii or Herculaneum,¹⁶⁷ and references to magic do not appear, even obliquely, in the abundant graffiti from these sites, material that allows “an attempt to define a popular culture of the time”.¹⁶⁸ As Andrew Wilburn has observed in his study of the archaeology of magic in Roman Egypt, Cyprus and Spain (a study predicated upon a much more expansive definition of magic than the one employed in this paper):¹⁶⁹

The preserved evidence of enacted magic such as curse tablets is comparatively small when juxtaposed with other corpora of textual artifacts such as public inscriptions and ostraca. The number of published curse tablets stands at approximately 1,600 which derive from over a period of approximately one thousand years and the full geographic extent of the Roman Empire. In contrast, over one

thousand ostraca have been published from the University of Michigan excavations at the site of Karnis alone.¹⁷⁰

Even when we do discover objects that can, with reasonable certainty, be categorised as magical, what we can deduce from them about the significance of magic in the early Roman empire is far from self-evident. Although it is common to see such things as having “attendant beliefs and assumptions”¹⁷¹ what exactly these might be is not easily discerned. What can we say about the “attendant beliefs and assumptions” possessed by an amulet that was claimed to render the wearer invisible?¹⁷² Did those manufacturing and using such an object really think that it worked? Did they imagine it was as efficacious as, say, those amulets that were declared, rather more modestly, to relieve indigestion or alleviate a hangover? Or to make the wearer more popular or lucky? (all claims that allowed a rather more subjective assessment of their veracity).¹⁷³ What can we say about the kind of beliefs that “attended” to the *defixio* found in Hadrumetum (Sousse) in which a man sought to make four women fall in love with him? Does the large number of potential lovers tell us merely about the ambition of the man or does it tell us that he did not hold out much hope of the likely efficacy of such a practice in relation to any of the women named?¹⁷⁴ And what of a bracelet made up of over forty different “charms” found at Herculaneum?¹⁷⁵ Should it be considered evidence of the significance of magic in the life of the wearer? Or was it primarily decorative, sentimental, or even a form of mnemonic device, providing a means of exercising control over the universe, in a limited but effective way, though not through the supernatural power of magic but through the process of collecting to which it bears witness¹⁷⁶ and the autobiographical structuring of memory such an activity can facilitate?¹⁷⁷ Of course, none of these alternatives need be the sole “meaning” of the charm bracelet for the wearer or others creating or

encountering it, and none need preclude the possibility that magic was, indeed, a constituent part of its variegated “attendant beliefs” but they do alert us to the possibility that magic might, at best, be just one, perhaps inconsequential element in the meaning ascribed to an object, even an object that some might assume *must* be understood in such a way.

Indeed, we should be careful not to mistake the presence of an object with the simple presence of particular ideas, magical or otherwise. Although artefacts may have the capacity to “symbolise the deepest human anxieties and aspirations”,¹⁷⁸ such as those associated with the agonistic obsessions of love, sport, law and business, that are, for example, the stuff of ancient magic, and such objects might relay “a cultural image of the way in which the universe works”,¹⁷⁹ they also have “social lives”¹⁸⁰ and “biographies”,¹⁸¹ determined locatively and temporally, and we should not overlook what Woodward calls the “idiosyncrasies, incoherencies and sheer mundanity of the user’s perspective.”¹⁸² We know, for example, that some who wore amulets (which were, as we have noted, not necessarily understood to be magical), had little interest in their supposed effects,¹⁸³ and others recommended their use for psychological benefits but completely disavowed any “worldview” implicit in their manufacture.¹⁸⁴

Even tombstones do not provide us with evidence of the saliency of magic in the everyday lives of inhabitants of the Roman empire that is quite as solid as it might at first appear. We have tens of thousands of epitaphs, often recounting the manner in which the person commemorated met their death, but the epitaph mentioned at the outset of this paper is one of only a handful that speak of someone being killed by witchcraft.¹⁸⁵

In short, the data often taken as evidence for the cultural significance of magic in the early Roman empire, even when examined on its own, in isolation from the wider social context

to which we shall now turn, is not as unequivocal or necessarily as substantive as is often assumed.¹⁸⁶

AN EMPTY BOX? THE ABSENCE OF MAGIC

Although it is generally correct to say that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, if magic were something of significance in the early Roman empire, we would expect to find evidence of its presence in sources that shed light on the day-to-day lives of its inhabitants,¹⁸⁷ that is, to find evidence of it in those texts and artefacts which, however imperfectly, could be said to be indicative of popular culture. If we leave aside those sources that are directly concerned with magic, such as the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* or Apuleius' *Apologia* — compelling though they may be, and particularly so when grouped together in collections dedicated solely to the subject of magic in antiquity¹⁸⁸ — and instead look at those sources that reveal the general preoccupations of the time, we discover a near silence concerning all things magical. The lack of interest is striking and unequivocal. Witches, sorcerers, and spells warrant virtually no mention or none at all in, for example, the popular ethical literature common in the early Roman empire, the collections of proverbs, fables, gnomai, and exempla.¹⁸⁹ The only appearance of a magical practitioner in Aesop's *Fabulae*, for example, a body of literature that was culturally omnipresent and popular across all strata of Graeco-Roman culture,¹⁹⁰ is one in which the powers of a witch are ridiculed (with no untoward effects):

One of the spectators, seeing her [a witch] being dragged out of the court said to her: "How is it that you claim to be able to avert the gods' anger, that you were not even able to persuade human beings?"¹⁹¹

Nor is magic of consequence in the *Vita Aesopi* either, the comic biography of the fabulist, composed around the second century

CE.¹⁹² The collection of exempla by Valerius Maximus, from the reign of Tiberius, and a useful window into common assumptions and obsessions, likewise, contains no clear reference to magic.¹⁹³

Magic and magicians also play little part in popular paradoxographical literature of the period, such as Phlegon of Tralles' *de Mirabilis*, texts that seem to have had a wide readership across social and cultural groups in the Principate.¹⁹⁴ Nor do they feature in Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica*, a handbook of dream interpretations that provides an extremely valuable repository of the anxieties of the time and which has been likened to an ethnography of the second-century Mediterranean world.¹⁹⁵ Whilst the *Oneirocritica* indicates that those who lived in the early Roman empire were fearful of such things as disease¹⁹⁶ and poverty,¹⁹⁷ and dreamed of a host of subjects, from having sex with their mother,¹⁹⁸ to being crucified,¹⁹⁹ or getting dressed the wrong way in the morning,²⁰⁰ they did not dream of magicians or spells. Nor, from the range of interpretations given, was magic one of the things that they believed that their dreams were *really* about.²⁰¹ Magic is also not a subject that appears in Roman joke books, such as the *Philogelos*, again a useful source for identifying the general preoccupations of the time and which, instead, finds humour in such perennial topics as sickness, sex and intellectuals' lack of common sense.²⁰² And it is not a concern of the popular do-it-yourself oracle books such as the *Lots of Astrampsychos*.²⁰³ Although this text does have an exotic quality to it — it took its name from a mythical Zoroastrian priest²⁰⁴ — when we scrutinise the wide variety of questions that could be asked of the oracle (of which there were 92), and the answers given (of which there were 1030), it is clear that magic was of no consequence.²⁰⁵ Other things preoccupy the text and, one assumes, those using it, such as employment, health, love, fertility, travel, business and death. Nor is magic amongst the

causes of fortune and misfortune assumed. Similarly, the popular *Homeromanteion*, an oracle which consisted of 216 lines of Homer that provided possible answers to whatever questions were put to it, makes no direct reference to magic or witchcraft even though many of the excerpts from Homer were taken from the *Odyssey*, a text which, as we have noted, has a considerable interest in magical themes.²⁰⁶ Such material appears to indicate that most people were unconcerned by magic, most of the time. They clearly did not think it had explanatory power in making sense of their lives or obtaining their goals. Nor was it something perceived to be a threat. Nor did they ascribe to it any symbolic significance. They were, it appears, at best, indifferent to it. From these popular cultural texts it is fair to conclude that it had little saliency in the early Roman empire.

In the light of the preceding discussion, it is apparent that Betz's assertion that, "Magical beliefs and practices can hardly be overestimated in their importance for the daily lives of the people",²⁰⁷ is untenable. It is clear that the significance of magic in the lives of those in the early Roman empire can, in fact, all too easily be overestimated and, indeed, regularly is. To put it crudely, and I am aware the distinction has its limitations, for most of the inhabitants of the Roman empire, for most of the time, magic appears to have been largely the stuff of stories and not of life.

EXPLAINING INDIFFERENCE

It is not necessary to explain *why* inhabitants of the early Roman empire had such limited interest in magic in order for our conclusions about its lack of saliency to stand. Nonetheless, given that it is often, even if erroneously, assumed that magic was a significant preoccupation of pre-modern cultures, this unusual finding does invite further comment and I would like to posit some tentative, partial, explanations for this phenomenon.

Indifference is under theorised in the study of religion in antiquity (although it is of increasing interest for the study of contemporary religion)²⁰⁸ nonetheless I would like to suggest three possible reasons for the absence of interest in magic in the lives of most inhabitants of the empire, most of the time. I believe that it is probably, in part, a consequence of the existence of widespread scepticism of two kinds, which whilst related are not synonymous: (a) scepticism concerning the supernatural and (b) scepticism concerning magic.²⁰⁹ In addition, it is also likely to be (c) a function, on those limited occasions when it was indeed used, of the agonistic contexts within which magic was deployed in the early Roman empire, something that we shall return to at the conclusion of this essay.

It is important to emphasise that the term “scepticism” is used here both in the modern, popular sense of active disbelief, as well as the related sense of the necessary suspension of judgement where a valid conclusion is impossible, for example, about the causation of a phenomenon. I am not using it with Pyrrhonism and formal philosophical Scepticism in mind.²¹⁰ It is also important to emphasise that scepticism about magic does not necessarily imply scepticism about the power of the gods, although the reverse is not the case.²¹¹

However, the use of the concept “scepticism” requires some defence. It could be said to be misguided, to be both unhelpfully polarising²¹² and to approach the subject with unwarranted, anachronistic, presuppositions about the necessary significance of “belief” in the study of religion generally, and the religions of antiquity more specifically.²¹³ As Ken Dowden quite rightly says:

One of the hardest features of ancient religion for the modern student is the sheer unimportance of belief. [...] The ancient religions are not dead faiths, they are obsolete practices.²¹⁴

It could also be said to be an idea that does not do justice to the

mutually contradictory ways of talking about the gods that were common and allowable in the empire that resulted from “the different kinds of assent and criteria of judgement”²¹⁵ applied in different contexts; an approach to religion characterised by what Veyne calls “mental Balkanization”.²¹⁶ Such a view is most clearly evident in the three very different *theologiae* of poetry, politics and philosophy identified by Varro.²¹⁷

Nonetheless, whilst it is true that public, elective, and domestic cults of the empire did not have any place for instrumental or soteriological conceptualisations of belief,²¹⁸ and nor did magic, religion and magic in the empire were both predicated on certain assumptions, such as the efficacy of ritual and the power of the gods that underpinned their workings.²¹⁹ Such “beliefs” (or, perhaps better, “ideas” or “convictions”) were not the kind that required active assent — they were not beliefs “in” but rather beliefs “that”²²⁰ — they were not of a soteriological but of an epistemological kind.

However, even beliefs of this sort can be the subject of dissent (rituals, for example, can be left undone) and so it is not unreasonable to speculate on the role of scepticism in making sense of the lack of interest in magic in the empire. And whilst it is true that most of those in the empire operated with a number of different, apparently mutually contradictory, *theologiae* of the kind identified by Varro, this does not preclude us from talking about scepticism, although it does require us to be sensitive to the situational articulation of such beliefs so that we do not misread the evidence.

SCEPTICAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SUPERNATURAL

There is evidence of a significant degree of scepticism concerning the supernatural in the early Roman empire, particularly in relation to the possibility of direct intervention by

the gods or other supernatural powers in human life (something that is not necessarily the same as scepticism about the existence of the gods *per se*). Such an argument is not dependent upon the number of those who identified themselves with philosophical schools that were hostile to supernaturalism, such as the Epicureans, Cynics, and Sceptics, something that, relative to the population as a whole, is unlikely to have been large.²²¹ We should not overlook the attempts by members of these movements to disseminate key doctrines beyond their core adherents, seen, for example, in the remarkable inscription at Oenoanda in Lycia which gave passers-by access to an extensive collection of Epicurean treatises,²²² or the notorious behaviour of Cynics that was intended, in part, to both embody and communicate their ideas to a wide audience,²²³ but their success appears to have been limited.²²⁴

Rather scepticism towards the supernatural went beyond such circles and was not necessarily associated with strong philosophical commitments or philosophical identities of any particular kind. This is evident, for example, in historiographical and medical discourses prominent in the early Roman empire in which the supernatural was not a causative agent in the lives of humans. Some historians of the period excoriated those that believed it was,²²⁵ whilst most seem to have been studiously “ambivalent”²²⁶ about the direct intervention of the gods in human history, and it is common to find naturalistic explanations for allegedly supernatural events,²²⁷ even if many were not always consistent in their approach.²²⁸ Naturalistic explanations of disease were also dominant in professional medical discourses of the empire that were indebted, directly or indirectly, to the Hippocratic tradition that effectively demythologised supernatural aetiologies.²²⁹ Of course, such rational approaches to disease and healing should not be crudely contrasted with those that allowed room for intervention from

the gods (even the physician Galen could believe that the god Asklepios had saved him from the plague and that he was only a doctor because the god had appeared in dreams to his father),²³⁰ nor should we assume that they were dominant in popular culture²³¹ but they were well known²³² and contributed to the normalisation of discourse in imperial culture which was sceptical of the supernatural.²³³

Although no one in the Roman empire achieved the notoriety of the infamous “atheist” Diagoras of Melos of the fifth century BCE who not only mocked the Eleusinian mysteries but, after his prayer for the return of a lost manuscript went unanswered, boiled up some turnips on a fire kindled with a wooden statue of Heracles,²³⁴ it is also the case that there were some who, at least on occasion, showed a comparable lack of concern for the supernatural power of the gods. The general Claudius Pulcher, for example, famously drowned the sacred chickens who refused to eat when offered grain, and so failed to provide a positive omen for his forthcoming (and unsuccessful) campaign, quipping “If they will not eat, let them drink.”²³⁵ And he was hardly alone.²³⁶ According to Suetonius, Roman crowds, grief-stricken at the death Germanicus despite their prayers, “stoned the temples, and toppled the divine altars, while others flung their household gods into the street”, in part, no doubt, in an attempt to punish the gods but also an indication that the gods were judged to be powerless.²³⁷

It was not unusual to doubt whether gods were capable of intervening in human affairs,²³⁸ and such a position was not limited to moments of collective crisis or disappointment.²³⁹ We find plenty of examples of popular, everyday scepticism in the period. So for example, one of Babrius’ Aesopic fables reads: “Since the gods do not know who steals from their own temples what is the use of appealing to them for help in finding any other lost property?”²⁴⁰ In the *Enchiridion*, Epictetus is reported

as observing that those who did not obtain what they expected in life were prone to abuse the gods and accuse them of being uninterested in human affairs, something that was particularly true of farmers, sailors, merchants and those who had been bereaved.²⁴¹

On occasion, the gods, both new and old, could be the subjects of ruthless satire²⁴² and irreverent behaviour: their festivals²⁴³ and oracles²⁴⁴ mocked, their sacred groves cut down,²⁴⁵ sacrifices stolen,²⁴⁶ and cult images abused.²⁴⁷ People could even dress up as gods for fancy dress parties²⁴⁸ and make the condemned parade as gods for sport before their execution.²⁴⁹ It is, perhaps, no surprise that there was such widespread concern in the empire about the danger of *impietas* ("denying the gods the honours and rank that were rightfully theirs")²⁵⁰ and, in particular, *impietas* that was deliberate, with malicious intent, rather than accidental (*prudens dolo malo* rather than *imprudens*), something that was inexpiable.²⁵¹ Clearly, there were at least some in the empire more than willing to behave in a manner that showed no fear of supernatural retribution, to the concern of their contemporaries.²⁵²

In addition to scepticism of the supernatural evident in the behaviour of some towards the gods, there are also indications that other supernatural powers could be approached with significant scepticism. Epitaphs, for example, could mock the existence of ghosts²⁵³ and interest in demons could be ranked alongside interest in quail fighting, as a frivolous waste of time.²⁵⁴ Even those traditionally believed, at least amongst the elite, Roman males who dominate our literary sources, to be particularly receptive to such beliefs, had, according to Cicero, albeit writing from the context of the late Republic, become more rational:

Who now credits that the hippocentaur or the Chimaera ever existed? Is there a single old woman to be found who is so unhinged

as the be sorely afraid of those monsters in the nether world in which people once believed? Time obliterates the falsehoods of common belief.²⁵⁵

The existence of scepticism towards the supernatural in the early Roman empire, whether of an intellectual or apparently more visceral kind, is certainly not key, nor even, necessarily significant, in explaining the lack of saliency of magic, but it undoubtedly had a part to play in this phenomenon.

SCEPTICAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS MAGIC

There is considerable evidence that magic in the early Roman empire was regularly denounced as fraudulent. As Gordon has effectively demonstrated, important representations of magic in antiquity “conceived of it not as powerful for harm but, on the contrary as vacant show, as empty nonsense.”²⁵⁶ And such scepticism was not just an elite perspective: “Although this view is associated generally with the educated elite, it was also a view widespread in the population at large: for most of the time, under most circumstances, many people considered ... it absurd”;²⁵⁷ something that played on people’s foolish and extravagant hopes. Those writers, such as Petronius, that made extensive use of magic in their narratives did so “to enthrall and entertain in their own right, but at the same time they serve to convey the gullibility and feeble-mindedness of their tellers”.²⁵⁸ And they were not alone. The hostility towards magical practitioners evident in the Aesopic fable to which we earlier referred²⁵⁹ is a sentiment that recurs elsewhere.²⁶⁰ The failure of magic to achieve results was infamous. The inefficacy of love magic, for example, is a recurring topos in literature.²⁶¹ In Ovid’s *Heroides* even Medea has to admit she cannot be successful at this.²⁶² The idea that magicians and witches were frauds who preyed on the vulnerable is a recurring motif in a range of texts.²⁶³ It can be seen, for example, in Tacitus’ account of the story of the young

Servilia, tried before the Senate for using magicians to determine the future fate of her family after it had fallen foul of Nero, and forced to commit suicide as a consequence.²⁶⁴

Stinging criticisms of magical claims can be found in medical writing too. Galen mounted a savage attack on Pamphilus, composer of a treatise on herbs which included extensive discussion of their magical properties, denouncing it as “long-winded Egyptian sorcery” so incredible that not even a child could believe it.²⁶⁵ And for the encyclopaedist Pliny the Elder the fact that Nero had reportedly sought to become a magician but, despite all the means he had at his disposal, had failed, was evidence that magic was fraudulent, “ineffectual, vain”.²⁶⁶ Cynic criticisms of the claims of magicians were also common. According to Lucian, Demonax confronted a magician who claimed to be able to obtain whatever he wanted by means of incantations, and offered to go to the nearest baker and turn a coin into a loaf of bread.²⁶⁷

For some critics, magic was no more than trickery. For example, Plutarch mentions a witch using her knowledge of the occurrence of an eclipse to achieve the so-called Thessalian trick:²⁶⁸

Aglaonice, a Thessalonian woman — though being thoroughly acquainted with the periods of the full moon, when it is subject to eclipse, and knowing, beforehand the time what the moon was due to be overtaken by the earth’s shadow, imposed upon the (other) women, and made them all believe that she was drawing down the moon.²⁶⁹

Indeed, a number of authors appear to have written works containing rational, reductionist explanations of the secrets of magic. These evidently circulated widely in the empire as Philostratus can mention in passing that several individuals “who have laughed out loud at the art”, had written books on how its effects were manufactured, and seems to assume that these

would be familiar to his readers.²⁷⁰ Such rationalisations were of various kinds. Some seem surprisingly modern whilst others are wedded to specific ideas about causation that might seem implausible to us.²⁷¹ The plausibility of such rationalisations to us is, of course, of no consequence — the issue is the plausibility of such rationalisations for those who lived in the early Roman empire.

Although no texts of the kind alluded to by Philostratus have come down to us, Hippolytus' *Refutatio omnium haeresium*²⁷² does include a substantial section that appears to be dependent upon a source of this kind, and gives us our most extensive exposé of the fraudulent techniques of magicians. In this we hear, for example, that magicians demonstrated their powers — such as drawing down the moon and reading sealed letters — in mostly darkened rooms, a context conducive to deception, and used such staples of modern stage magic as misdirection, prestidigitation, and ingenious stage props.²⁷³ A skull could be made to speak, for example, by the surreptitious use of the long windpipe of a crane;²⁷⁴ the clever deployment of rocks, planks and sheets of brass, could create the illusion that the magician is able to summon up thunder.²⁷⁵

Such books may well have made public the secrets of a particular genre known as *Paignia* or “trifles”, of which our most extensive, surviving fragment, ascribed to Democritus, can be found, somewhat tellingly, in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*.²⁷⁶ These works seem to have given specific recipes to create dramatic effects, akin to childhood chemistry experiments, some of which were designed to liven up dinner parties²⁷⁷ but others of which, such as those found in the *Paignia* of Salpe, or the collection by Anaxilaus of Larissa, were evidently intended to be employed in other contexts,²⁷⁸ and “could be used to impress the gullible with the superhuman powers of the magician”.²⁷⁹

Some provided rational explanations of the apparent effects

of magic of a somewhat different kind. Rather than expose the techniques of its practitioners, they attacked the non-falsifiable nature of its claims. Such criticisms had a long pedigree. The author of the Hippocratic work, *De morbo sacro*, for example, said of magicians that if a patient recovered, they would claim the credit but if they died, they would “have a sure fund of excuses, with the defence that they are not at all to blame, but the gods.”²⁸⁰

And a similar argument is made by Philostratus who provides a surprisingly modern-sounding explanation for the apparent success of magic: to those committed to its use it can never fail, the believer will always provide technical or other excuses to justify whatever outcome occurs; an observation strikingly reminiscent of Malinowski.²⁸¹

The vulnerability of magic to rational criticism in the early Roman empire is perhaps no better seen than, somewhat paradoxically, in the defence used by some of those tried for practising it. As Pliny recounts, a farmer accused of achieving outstanding yields by magical means defended himself by explaining that toil, not magic, led to his abundant harvests.²⁸² Scepticism about magic was clearly vibrant in the empire and may also have contributed to its lack of cultural saliency.

THE DEPLOYMENT OF MAGIC

The lack of significance of magic in the day-to-day lives of inhabitants of the early Roman empire was probably not only a consequence of scepticism about the supernatural and scepticism about magic itself. It may also have been, in part, a consequence of the context of its deployment, on the limited occasions when some made use of it, something that, as we noted earlier, appears to have been primarily agonistic. There is good reason for thinking that such agonistic use accompanied conceptualisations of magic in which it would be understood to be insubstantial; something ephemeral, equivocal and transitory.

The approach taken by Galina Lindquist,²⁸³ is particularly useful for identifying the nature of such magic. Magic accessed in contexts characterised by deep uncertainty and lack of control,²⁸⁴ according to Lindquist, is a form of materialised “hope” conjured up by frustrated agency, “where the uncertainty of life calls for methods of existential reassurance and control that rational and technical means cannot offer.”²⁸⁵ However, the use of magic is not just an attempt to stack the odds in one’s favour through supernatural assistance but has other, more substantive effects. For example, Lindquist usefully suggests that it can redefine a situation, taking away responsibility and accountability for misfortune by transforming “risk” (something dependent upon the decision of an individual) into “danger” (something that can be attributed to the environment).²⁸⁶ As she puts it, “When one risks and loses, one has only oneself to blame. In danger, if one is struck and hit, one is an unwitting victim, unfortunate but not guilty.”²⁸⁷ There is a temporal and contingent dimension to belief of this kind, and it is not useful to think only in terms of what someone “believes” when a curse is written or spell cast but also about the subsequent form this takes (as Jean-Claude Schmitt has rightly said, “a belief is never a completed activity”).²⁸⁸ Once the challenge has passed, Lindquist found that the need for magic or even the recognition of its efficacy often diminishes or vanishes.²⁸⁹ Clients create post hoc rationalisations of events, similar to Arthur Kleinman’s “explanatory models” familiar from medical anthropology and which reflect the plural, indeterminate, and mutable character of potential interpretations over time.²⁹⁰ Although we lack first-hand accounts to confirm this reading for the early Roman empire, I would suggest that narrations of magic in this period, for most of the limited numbers that seem to have accessed it, would have taken a similar shape to that found in the lives of Lindquist’s contemporary informants: it would acquire a degree

of potential saliency at time of need but rather less or none in retrospect as the individual returns to a society in which magic, when it was thought about at all, was viewed as an unsanctioned and problematic activity — whether because it was something shocking and subversive or something embarrassing and risible.

CONCLUSION

There is a great deal more that can be said about the nature and place of magic in the early Roman empire. It would, for example, be useful to explain why magic did have considerable and unusual saliency for the early Christians, and the factors that led them to conjure up a useful, oppositional illusion of an enchanted and enslaved world.²⁹¹ The alleged significance of magic in the empire is not solely a matter of smoke and mirrors, but by arriving at their estimations of its importance by focusing solely on evidence of its presence, of being too quick to fall under the spell of texts such as the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, scholars in the field could be said to have unwittingly been guilty of the classic magician's trick of misdirection, and have themselves missed perhaps the feature of magic in the early Roman empire that is its most surprising: its lack of significance in the day-to-day lives of its inhabitants. Whilst they clearly enjoyed stories about magic, magic itself seems to have been largely inconsequential and ephemeral, of only fleeting importance, and the subject of the most attenuated and sporadic interest except amongst a handful. We have made some suggestions as to why this might be so, but the necessary process of revision and re-description has only just begun. Despite the plethora of publications in the field, substantial work, some of the most fundamental kind, clearly remains to be done.

Notes

1. For example, Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), xli.
2. Pliny, *Naturalis historia* 28.4.19. Pliny also claimed that such belief was not new but had "held sway throughout the world for many ages" (30.1.1).
3. Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 8.1–31. For Apollonius and the accusation of magic, see Roshan J. Abraham, "Magic and Religious Authority in Philostratus' 'Life of Apollonius of Tyana'" (PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2009); Erkki Koskenniemi, *Apollonios von Tyana in der neutestamentlichen Exegese: Forschungsbericht und Weiterführung der Diskussion*, WUNT 61 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1994); Andy M. Reimer, *Miracle and Magic: A Study in the Acts of the Apostles and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, JSNTSup 235 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).
4. Apuleius, *Apologia* (*Pro se de magia*). For studies of the *Apologia*, see Adam Abt, *Die Apologie des Apuleius von Madaura und die antike Zauberei: Beiträge zur Erläuterung, der schrift de magia*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 4.2. (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1908), 39–86; Keith R. Bradley, "Law, Magic, and Culture in the 'Apologia' of Apuleius," *Phoenix* 51.2 (1997): 203–23, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1088495>; Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip, *Revealing Antiquity* 10 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 65–88; Stephen J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39–86; Vincent Hunink, ed., "Pro Se de Magia: (Apologia). Text and Commentary" (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1997); Ulrike Riemer, "Fascinating but Forbidden? Magic in Rome," in *A Kind of Magic: Understanding Magic in the New Testament and Its Religious Environment*, ed. Michael Labahn and L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, LNTS 306 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 160–72; Werner Riess, ed., *Paideia at Play: Learning and Wit in Apuleius* (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2008); James B. Rives, "Magic in Roman Law: The Reconstruction of a Crime," *Classical Antiquity* 22.2 (2003): 313–39, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ca.2003.22.2.313>. Apollonius and Apuleius are also both discussed by Augustine. See Fritz Graf, "Augustine and Magic," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 87–103.

5. Tacitus, *Annales* 2.69. See also Suetonius, *Gaius Caligula* 3.3 and Dio Cassius 57.18.9. See Allan A. Lund, "Zur Vergiftung des Germanicus (Tac. Ann. 2, 69)," *Philologus* 153.1 (2009): 173–80, <https://doi.org/10.1524/phil.2009.0011>; Anne-Marie Tupet, "Les pratiques magiques à la mort de Germanicus," in *Mélanges de littérature et d'épigraphie latines, d'histoire ancienne et d'archéologie. Hommage à la mémoire de Pierre Wuillemier*, ed. H. Le Bonniec and G. Vallet (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 345–52. Germanicus died in Antioch-on-the-Orontes in 19 CE.
6. Petronius' *Satyricon* could also be legitimately classified as a novel, despite the extensive use of poetry. However, substantial sections of this work are missing. We only have books fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen out of the twenty-four books that probably constituted the original. See Gareth Schmeling, *A Commentary on the Satyricon of Petronius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 460–61. The *Satyricon* also shows an extensive interest in magic. See, for example, Petronius, *Sat.* 61–63, 131.
7. For studies of the representation of magic in the *Metamorphoses*, see Stavros Frangoulidis, *Witches, Isis and Narrative: Approaches to Magic in Apuleius' "Metamorphoses"* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008); Luca Graverini, *Literature and Identity in the Golden Ass of Apuleius*, trans. Benjamin Todd Lee (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2012); David Walter Leinweber, "Witchcraft and Lamiae in 'The Golden Ass,'" *Folklore* 105 (1994): 77–82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1260631>; Consuelo Ruiz-Montero, "Magic in the Ancient Novel," in *The Greek and the Roman Novel: Parallel Readings*, ed. Michael Paschalis et al. (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2007), 38–56; John J. Winkler, *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's the Golden Ass* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985). Apuleius' novel has had a considerable effect on the subsequent portrayals of magic and witchcraft in Europe; see Julia Haig Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the "Golden Ass": A Study in Transmission and Reception* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008). A Greek version of the same story, Pseudo-Lucian's *Onos*, displays a similar interest in magic. For the *Onos*, see Graham Anderson, *Studies in Lucian's Comic Fiction* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 34–67 — although Anderson argues for Lucian's authorship. Both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Onos* were based on an earlier, longer, Greek version of the story; see H. J. Mason, "Greek and Latin Versions of the Ass-Story," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. II.34.2.*, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 1665–1707; Helmut van Thiel, *Der Eselsroman*, 2 vols., *Zetemata: Monographien zur klassischen*

Altertumswissenschaft 54.1 (München: C. H. Beck, 1971).

8. For treatments of magic and magical practitioners in classical literature see, for example, Samuel Eitrem, "La magie comme motif littéraire chez les grecs et les Romains," *Symbolae Osloenses* 21.1 (1941): 39–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00397674108590361>; J. E. Lowe, *Magic in Greek and Latin Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1929); Georg Luck, "Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe 2 (London: Athlone, 1999), 91–158; Elizabeth Ann Pollard, "Witch-Crafting in Roman Literature and Art: New Thoughts on an Old Image," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 3.2 (2008): 119–55, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mrw.0.0115>; Kimberly B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, and Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007); Anne-Marie Tupet, *La Magie dans la poésie latine* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1976).
9. See Heraclitus, *Allegoriae Homericae* 1.5–6; cf. 76.3–5; Horace, *Epistulae* 2.2.41–2; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.8.5. For the place of Homer in both Greek and Roman education, see Stanley Frederick Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 213; Henri Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, 6th ed. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965), 246–47; Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 69–71, 105–15. See also Petronius, *Sat.* 48, 59. For a discussion of the significance of Homer in Roman culture more generally, see Joseph Farrell, "Roman Homer," in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 254–71.
10. Pliny, *Nat.* 30.2.5.
11. For the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, see Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*; William M. Brashear, "The Greek Magical Papyri," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. II.18.5*, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 3380–3684; Karl Preisendanz, Adam Abt, and Albert Henrichs, eds., *Papyri graecae magicae: die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973).
12. Maryse Waegeman, *Amulet and Alphabet: Magical Amulets in the First Book of Cyprianides* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1987).
13. For the *Testament of Solomon*, see Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 179–82; Peter Busch, *Das Testament Salomos: die älteste christliche Dämonologie*,

kommentiert und in deutscher Erstübersetzung, TUGAL 153 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006); Dennis C. Duling, "The Testament of Solomon: Retrospect and Prospect," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 1.2 (1988): 87–112; Duling, "Testament of Solomon," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. Charlesworth (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 935–59; Sarah Iles Johnston, "The Testament of Solomon from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance," in *Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 35–49; Todd Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon: Tradition, Conflict and Identity in a Late Antique Pseudepigraphon*, LSTS 53 (London: T&T Clark, 2005); Sarah L. Schwarz, "Reconsidering the Testament of Solomon," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 16.3 (2007): 203–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0951820707077166>. Magic can also be found in texts concerned with other things, such as the pharmacopeia of Dioscorides. Dioscorides distinguished the medical usage of plants from their alleged magical properties in his *De materia medica*, placing the latter at the end of each chapter. He also made it clear to the reader that such traditions consisted of what others had said, rather than what he himself had determined through his own experience, experiment and observation (*Praef.* 2–5). See, for example, *De materia medica* 1.90, 1.103, 2.104, 2.125, 2.126, 3.91, 3.131, 4.20, 4.76, 4.130. See John M. Riddle, *Dioscorides on Pharmacy and Medicine* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985), 84. For a valuable translation and commentary, see Lily Y. Beck, trans., *Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarbus, de Materia Medica*, *Altertumswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien* 38 (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 2005).

14. For treatments of the theme of magic in *Acts*, see Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989); Hans Josef Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Brian McNeil (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000); Daniel Marguerat, "Magic and Miracle in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, ed. Todd Klutz, JSNTSup 245 (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 100–124; Stanley E. Porter, "Magic in the Book of Acts," in *A Kind of Magic: Understanding Magic in the New Testament and Its Religious Environment*, ed. Michael Labahn and L. J. Lietaert Peerbolte, LNTS 306 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 107–21; Reimer, *Miracle and Magic: A Study in the Acts of the Apostles and the Life of Apollonius of*

Tyana; Rainer Reuter, "Animosity against Jewish and Pagan Magic in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Animosity, the Bible, and Us*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald, Fika van Rensberg, and Herrie F. van Roey (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 123–36; Scott Shauf, *Theology as History, History as Theology: Paul in Ephesus in Acts 19*, BZNW 133 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005).

15. See, for example, the magical battle between Peter and Simon Magus found in *Acts of Peter* 23–32. See Jan N. Bremmer, "Magic in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic: From Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 51–70; Jan N. Bremmer, ed., *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles and Gnosticism*, Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998); Wilhelm Schneemelcher, "The Acts of Peter," in *New Testament Apocrypha: Writings Related to the Apostles, Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson, vol. 2 (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992).
16. Notably Bar-Jesus (Acts 13.6–12) and Simon Magus (*Acts of Peter* 4–32). For studies of the conflict between Bar-Jesus and Paul, see Susan R. Garrett, "Light on a Dark Subject and Vice Versa: Magic and Magicians in the New Testament," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 142–65; Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, 79–87; Arthur Darby Nock, "Paul and the Magus," in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 308–30; Rick Strelan, "Who Was Bar Jesus (Acts 13,6-12)?," *Biblica* 85.1 (2004): 65–81. Simon is first mentioned in Acts 8.9–24 where he is rebuked for attempting to purchase the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. He acquired the epithet "Magus" in subsequent literature and became a figure associated with both magic and gnosticism. See Tamás Adamik, "The Image of Simon Magus in the Christian Tradition," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 52–64; J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24)," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 73.1 (1982): 52–68; M. J. Edwards, "Simon Magus, the Bad Samaritan," in *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, ed. Catharine Edwards and S. Swaine (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 69–91; Alberto Ferreiro, "'Simon Magus, Dogs, and Simon Peter,'" in *Devil, Heresy and Witchcraft in the Middle*

Ages: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey B. Russell, ed. Alberto Ferreiro and Jeffrey Burton Russell (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 45–89; Alberto Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval and Early Modern Traditions*, *Studies in the Histories of Christian Traditions* 125 (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Gerd Lüdemann, “The Acts of the Apostles and the Beginnings of Simonian Gnosis,” *New Testament Studies* 33.3 (1987): 420–26; Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, “Simon Magus as a Narrative Figure in the Acts of Peter,” in *Apocryphal Acts of Peter*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer, *Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 39–51; Ayse Tuzlak, “The Magician and the Heretic: The Case of Simon Magus,” in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul A. Mirecki and Marvin Meyer, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 416–26.

17. Acts 19.11–20. For studies of this narrative, see Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*, 97–101; Shauf, *Theology as History, History as Theology: Paul in Ephesus in Acts 19*; Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, 89–99; Rick Strelan, *Strange Acts: Studies in the Cultural World of the Acts of the Apostles*, BZNW 126 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 107–12. For the symbolism of book burning in the empire, see Daniel Christopher Sarefield, “The Symbolics of Book Burning: The Establishment of a Christian Ritual of Persecution,” in *The Early Christian Book*, ed. William E. Klingshim and Linda Safran (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 159–73; Daniel Christopher Sarefield, “Book Burning in the Christian Roman Empire: Transforming a Pagan Rite of Purification,” in *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, ed. H. A. Drake (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 287–96.
18. See Christopher A. Faraone and Amina Kropp, “Inversion, Adversion and Perversion as Strategies in Latin Curse Tablets,” in *Magical Practice in the Latin West: Papers from the International Conference Held at the University of Zaragoza 30 Sept–1 Oct 2005*, ed. R. L. Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 381–98; Daniel Ogden, “Binding Spells: Curse Tablets and Voodoo Dolls in the Greek and Roman Worlds,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, *Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe* 2 (London: Athlone, 1999), 3–90.
19. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History*, 183–93; Dan Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003).
20. This is a problematic term but remains the best way of referring to

such objects in English. It is not meant to imply any association with contemporary religious practices found in Haiti, West Africa or elsewhere. See the remarks in Christopher A. Faraone, "Binding and Burying the Forces of Evil: The Defensive Use of 'Voodoo Dolls' in Ancient Greece," *Classical Antiquity* 10.2 (1991): 65, n. 4, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25010949>. The term "poppet", whilst increasingly common, is inappropriate as it is a term of endearment in a number of dialects of British English. For examples of the use of such dolls see Horace, *Satirae* 1.8; Ovid, *Heroides* 6.83–94; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Historia Alexandri Magni* 5; Theocritus, *Idylls* 2 (*Pharmakon*).

21. See, for example, Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1950); Roy Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets: The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze Lamellae*, *Papyrologica Coloniensia* 22.1 (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1994).
22. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*; Simone Michel, *Die magischen Gemmen: zu Bildern und Zauberformeln auf geschnittenen Steinen der Antike und Neuzeit* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004); John G. Gager, ed., *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*; Simone Michel, Peter Zazoff, and Hilde Zazoff, *Die magischen Gemmen im Britischen Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 2001); Daniel Ogden, ed., *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Hanna Philipp, *Mira et magica: Gemmen im Ägyptischen Museum der Staatlichen Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Charlottenburg* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1986).
23. For studies of the use of objects in actual practice, see Magali Bailliot, *Magie et sortilèges dans l'Antiquité romaine: Archéologie des rituels et des images* (Paris: Editions Hermann, 2010); Andrew Wilburn, *Materia Magica: The Archaeology of Magic in Roman Egypt, Cyprus, and Spain* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012).
24. See, for example, the depiction of Circe and her wand found on a first-century CE pottery oil lamp from Pozzuoli, in the British Museum, in Donald M. Bailey, *A Catalogue of the Lamps in the British Museum*, 4 vols. (London: British Museum Publications, 1975), Q949. Such imagery was relatively common. Another example can be found in the Antikensammlungen, Munich. W. B. Stanford has

argued that Circe's staff need not be interpreted as magical in the *Odyssey*. W. B. Stanford, "That Circe's ῥάβδος (*Od.* 10, 238 Ff.) Was Not a Magic Wand," *Hermathena* 66 (1945): 69–71. However, whilst this may be the case, subsequent receptions of the narrative were unanimous in understanding it in this way. For primary sources for Circe, see especially Homer, *Od.* 10.293, 388; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 14.278, 413; Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.189–91. For the depictions of Medea in material culture, see Margot Schmidt, "Medea," *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, 1.386–398, 2.194–202. For Medea in primary sources see especially Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*; Euripides, *Medea*; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 21–6; Ovid, *Her.* 12; *Metam.* 7.1–450; Pindar, *Pythionikai* 4; Seneca, *Medea*. See also the discussion of the Medea myth in James Joseph Clauss and Sarah Iles Johnston, eds., *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy and Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Emma Griffiths, *Medea* (London: Routledge, 2006). For the representation of witches in Roman art and literature more generally, see Luck, "Witches and Sorcerers in Classical Literature"; Pollard, "Witch-Crafting in Roman Literature and Art."

25. For mosaics, J. R. C. Cousland, "The Much Suffering Eye in Antioch's House of the Evil Eye: Is It Mithraic?," *Religious Studies and Theology* 24.1 (2005): 61–74; Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 312, 323–24. For amulets, Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, 97–100. For earrings, see, for example, the recent find of a Roman earring from Norwich featuring an evil eye being attacked and which probably had an apotropaic function (<http://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/490934> [Accessed 12 July 2023]). For useful discussions of the evil eye in the Roman empire, see Antón Alvar Nuño, "Ocular Pathologies and the Evil Eye in the Early Roman Principate," *Numen* 59.4 (2012): 295–321, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852712X641769>; Ari Z. Bryen and Andrzej Wypustek, "Gemellus' Evil Eyes (*P.Mich.* VI 423–424)," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 49.4 (2010): 535–55; Matthew W. Dickie, "The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 9–34; John H. Elliott, "Social-Scientific Criticism: Perspective, Process and Payoff. Evil Eye Accusation at Galatia as Illustration of the Method," *HTS Theologiese Studies-Theological Studies* 67.1 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i1.858>; Elliott, "The Evil Eye and the Sermon on the Mount," *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 2.1 (1994): 51–84, <https://doi.org/>

- 10.1163/156851594X00042. For more general studies, see Frederick Thomas Elworthy, *The Evil Eye: An Account of This Ancient and Widespread Superstition* (London: J. Murray, 1895); Clarence Maloney, ed., *The Evil Eye* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1976). See Catullus, 5, 7; Horace, *Epist.* 1.14.37–38; Pliny, *Nat.* 7.2.16–18, 28.7.39; Plutarch, *Moralia* 680c–683b; Strabo, *Geographica* 14.2.7, 654c; Virgil, *Eclogae* 3.103.
26. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 6.19747; see Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 119. For a catalogue of inscriptions that make reference to, or might make reference to, untimely death as a result of witchcraft, see Fritz Graf, “Untimely Death, Witchcraft, and Divine Vengeance. A Reasoned Epigraphical Catalog,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 162 (2007): 139–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20191339>.
27. For socio-religious prohibitions against magic, see C. R. Phillips, “Nullum Crimen Sine Lege: Socioreligious Sanctions on Magic,” in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 260–76. For legal prohibitions, see Derek Collins, *Magic in the Ancient Greek World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 132–65; Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 275–99; Clyde Pharr, “The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 63 (1932): 269–95, <https://doi.org/10.2307/283219>; Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 124–27; Rives, “Magic in Roman Law”; Rives, “Magic, Religion and Law: The Case of the Lex Cornelia de Sicariis et Veneficiis,” in *Religion and Law in Classical and Christian Rome*, ed. Clifford Ando and Jörg Rüpke (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006), 47–67. Magic, *per se*, was not a subject of legislation in Greek law, though actions that might be interpreted as magical could provoke a legal charge of ἀσέβεια (impiety). See Phillips, “Nullum Crimen Sine Lege: Socioreligious Sanctions on Magic,” 262. For an example of a legal accusation of magic during the Principate see *P.Mich.* VI.423 and 424 (Karanis, Roman Egypt, 197 CE); discussed in Bryen and Wypustek, “Gemellus’ Evil Eyes (*P.Mich.* VI 423–424)”; David Frankfurter, “Fetus Magic and Sorcery Fears in Roman Egypt,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 46.1 (2006): 37–62.
28. Notably Sulla’s *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* (81 BCE). See Paulus, *Sententiae* 5.23.15–18.

29. Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, and Stereotype in the Ancient World*, 107. See, for example, Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.4.7, 1.13.1–6, 2.31.2–3, 2.32. See also Todd Breyfogle, “Magic, Women, and Heresy in the Late Empire: The Case of the Priscillianists,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin W. Meyer and Paul A. Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 435–54. Interestingly this was not the case in Second Temple Judaism. See Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History*, 76.
30. See, for example, Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, 123–39. See plates viii and ix. Such gems are often associated with the second-century Christian gnostic Basilides or gnosticism more generally, but it is unwise to assume an exclusive or even primary identification of Abraxas/Abrasax and gnostic thought and practice; the deity appears to have had much wider appeal and non-gnostic origins. See L. Janssens, “L’apport de Perse aux études néroniennes. Abrasax, le dieu de Néron,” in *Neronia 1977: actes du 2e Colloque de la Société internationale d’études néroniennes*, Clermont-Ferrand, 27-28 mai 1977, ed. Jean-Michel Croisille and P.-M. Fauchère (Clermont-Ferrand: ADOSA, 1982), 191–222. See also A. A. Barb, “Abraxas-Studien,” *Latomus* 28 (1957): 67–86; A. A. Barb, “Gnostische, Gemme,” *Enciclopedia dell’Arte Antica, Classica e Orientale* 3:971–74; J. R. Harrison, “Overcoming the ‘Strong Man,’” in *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: Volume 10*, ed. S. R. Llewelyn and J. R. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 11; Martin Persson Nilsson, “The Anguipede of the Magical Amulets,” *Harvard Theological Review* 44.1 (1951): 61–64.
31. For such amulets see, for example, Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History*, 213. Solomon’s power over demons is found in a number of textual traditions. See, for example, Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae* 8.42–45; *Testament of Solomon*. See also Mary Margaret Fulghum, “Coins Used as Amulets in Late Antiquity,” in *Between Magic and Religion: Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and Society*, ed. Sulochana Ruth Asirvatham and John Watrous (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 142–43; Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon*.
32. This is, perhaps, particularly true for scholars of early Christianity, for whom material culture directly relevant to their field is thin on the ground before the conversion of Constantine. For useful analyses of the scant data relating to the *ante pacem* church, see Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200-400* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before*

- Constantine*, 2nd ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985).
33. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, xli.
 34. Scott B. Noegel, Joel T. Walker, and Brannon M. Wheeler, "Introduction," in *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, ed. Scott B. Noegel, Joel Thomas Walker, and Brannon M. Wheeler (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2003), 12.
 35. Indeed, some have suggested that "magic" should cease to be used as an analytical category on these grounds. David Pocock, for example, has argued that "if categorical distinctions of the Western mind are found upon examination to impose distinctions upon (and so falsify) the intellectual universes of other cultures then they must be discarded or, as I have put it, dissolved. I believe 'magic' to be one such category." David F. Pocock, "Foreword," in *A General Theory of Magic*, by Marcel Mauss, trans. Robert Brain, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1972), 2. Most in the field reject the notion that "magic" is a universally applicable category. See, for example, Alan F. Segal, "Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. R. van der Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 50–51; Jonathan Z. Smith, "Trading Places," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 16. For studies of the discursive contexts within which "magic" emerged as a discrete analytical category, see Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World*, *Reflection and Theory in the Study of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Stanley J. Tambiah, *Magic, Science and Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
 36. For example, Betz declares, "a definition of the notion of magic cannot be attempted here". Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, xlix, n. 6. Whilst Betz does refer the reader to some literature on the subject, it is a little surprising that in a book concerned with magic, of over three hundred and fifty pages in length, he does not attempt such a thing. This does result in some confusion. For example, at the outset of his work, Betz equates the burning of magical books in Acts 19.19 with the burning of books of prophecy, including forged Sibylline oracles, by Augustus in 13 BCE (Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 31.1). The two are not obviously comparable. The latter may have been regarded as threatening and seditious, but it is not evident that such books would have been considered magical — after all the authentic

- Sibylline oracles (some of which were saved from the conflagration) were a central and revered aspect of Roman religion. See H. W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*. (London: Routledge, 1988). A better parallel is found in Paulus, *Sent.* 5.23.18.
37. Ogden refuses to provide a definition of magic for his important sourcebook on the subject. The contents of his work are determined by "the subject matter of recent scholarly books on antiquity with such words as 'magic' in their titles". Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 5.
 38. As Cicero notes, "I know of no people, whether they be learned and refined or barbaric and ignorant, that does not consider that future things are indicated by signs, and that it is possible for certain people to recognise those signs and predict what will happen." (*De divinatione* 1.2). See, for example, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 4.62; Livy 1.18.6–10; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 1.605–38; Plutarch, *Numa* 7.
 39. See, for example, Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2008); Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck, eds., *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 155 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).
 40. For the centrality of divination in Roman religion, see the remarks of Cotta in Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.2. See also Livy 6.41.
 41. F. Gerald Downing, "Magic and Scepticism in and around the First Christian Century," in *Making Sense in (and of) the First Christian Century*, JSNTSup 197 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 208–22. Downing includes in his discussion of "oracular magic" the criticism of *haruspices* found in Cicero's *De divinatione*, which included Cato's famous quip that he was surprised a *haruspex* did not burst out laughing when he saw another one (*Div.* 2.24.52). Cicero's own position on the matter is rather more equivocal than is often assumed. It seems most likely that he was opposed to private divination (as were others, see Suetonius, *Tiberius* 63.1) and believed it was an example of *superstitio*, but approved of the official, public interpretation of portents as an acceptable element of *religio* (appropriate honouring of the gods). See, for example, *Div.* 2.72.148 and the discussion in Susanne William Rasmussen, *Public Portents in Republican Rome*, *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici. Supplementum* 34 (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2003), 215. Even when the *haruspices* are criticised in *De Divinatione* they are not criticised for practising magic. Downing's interpretation has more in common with that of the fourth-century Christian emperor Constantius II

who did not distinguish between traditional *haruspices*, astrologers, dream interpreters and magicians when outlawing pagan divinatory practices. See Marie Theres Fögen, "Balsamon on Magic: From Roman Secular Law to Byzantine Canon Law," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 103. See also *Codex justinianus* 9.18.3 (Constantine, 319 CE), 5 (Constantius II, 357 CE), 7 (Constantius II, 358 CE). Note Lucan's clear distinction between such practices that whilst arcane, were lawful, and "the mysteries of cruel witchcraft, which the gods abhor" (Lucan, *Phars.* 6.431). A similar distinction is also made in Dio Cassius 52.36.1–2.

42. As Rives rightly notes,

Since divination has been rigorously excluded from the dominant religious traditions of Europe and the Middle East ever since the conversion of Constantine, many people are now apt to think of it as mere fortune-telling, a way of looking in to the future. This was of course important, but there was generally more to it than that. [...] Divination was ... an essential complement to prayer and sacrifice, completing the circle of communication between gods and mortals. (James B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2007], 27)

43. See, for example, Marie-Laurence Haack, *Les haruspices dans le monde romain*, vol. 6 of *Scripta Antiqua* (Pessac: Ausonius, 2003); Bruce MacBain, *Prodigy and Expiation: A Study in Religion and Politics in Republican Rome*, Collection Latomus 177 (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1982); John A. North, "Diviners and Divination at Rome," in *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. Mary Beard and John A. North (London: Duckworth, 1990), 51–71; John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 111–26.

44. See, for example, Robert E. A. Palmer, "Bullae Insignia Ingenuitatis," *American Journal of Ancient History* 14.1 (1998): 1–69. See Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.6.7–13; Pliny, *Nat.* 33.4.10; Plutarch, *Romulus* 20.3, 25.5. Amulets were not understood *en masse* as "magical" in the early Roman empire, although some were, by virtue of their specific form and the use to which they were put. The blanket designation of them as such by some is unhelpful. See, for example, Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 261; Roy Kotansky, "Incantations and Prayers on Inscribed Greek Amulets," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 113–14. Pliny the Elder, for

instance, clearly distinguished between magic, the "most fraudulent of arts" (*Nat.* 30.1.1; cf. 28.12.48), to which he was strongly opposed, and the production and use of numerous amulets that he described, without criticism, in his *Naturalis historia*. Indeed, he singled some out as efficacious, and particularly helpful when employed where conventional medicine was unlikely to succeed. See for example, *Nat.* 30.30. See also Maria Cristina Martini, *Piante medicamentose e rituali magico-religiosi in Plinio* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1977). Likewise, Trajan could endorse a medical text for his legions that recommended the use of amulets, evidently perceiving such things to be clearly distinguishable from magic. Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (London: Routledge, 2004), 269. Ammianus Marcellinus' shock at the outlawing, in the late fourth century, of traditional, doctor-approved charms, is indicative of how such things were not considered magical in the earlier period (see Ammianus Marcellinus 16.8.1, 19.12.14). Even those medical writers who rejected the reasoning that lay behind amulets, such as the often rather arcane notions of sympathy and antipathy which most employed, could still view them as potentially beneficial to a patient's sense of well-being (see Soranus, *Gynaecia* 3.42). Amulets were ubiquitous and their use was largely uncontroversial. Indeed, those who rejected the use of amulets to protect themselves from disease were sufficiently eccentric as to be considered mad (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Caracalla* 5, 7). To judge from the archaeological record, almost everyone carried an amulet to aid digestion and ward off such things as fever. See Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets: Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*, 51–66.

45. See Cato, *De agricultura* 160. Also referred to in Pliny, *Nat.* 17.47.267. See Eric Laughton, "Cato's Charm for Dislocations," *The Classical Review* 52.2 (1938): 52–54, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009840X00073066>; W B McDaniel, "A Sempiternal Superstition. For a Dislocated Joint, a Split Green Reed, and a Latin Charm," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 15.2 (1972): 295–306; H. S. Versnel, "The Poetics of the Magical Charm. An Essay on the Power of Words," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Allan Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 105–58.
46. Our earliest source for Roman law, the *Lex Duodecim Tabularum* from the fifth century BCE outlawed specific practices — harmful incantations and the enchanting of crops — rather than magic *per se* (*XII Tab.* 8). See Cicero, *Orationes philippicae* 1.44; R. Westbrook, "The Nature and Origins of the Twelve Tables," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Romanistische Abteilung* 105

(1988): 74–121. However, such practices "were later reconceptualized as instances of magic". Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 317. By about the first century BCE magic itself was believed by the Romans to have always been outlawed. See also Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2002), 124–41; Richard Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, *Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe* 2 (London: Athlone, 1999), 164–65, 207, and 229–31.

47. Attilio Mastrocinque, *Kronos, Shiva, and Asklepios: Studies in Magical Gems and Religions of the Roman Empire* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 2011), 4.
48. Mastrocinque, *Kronos, Shiva, and Asklepios*, 5. For Asklepios, see Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, eds., *Asclepius: Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, *Truly beyond Wonders: Aelius Aristides and the Cult of Asklepios* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Studies of the imperial cult are legion. Notable contributions include: Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed, eds., *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011); Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
49. Sarah Iles Johnston, "Review Article: Describing the Undefinable: New Books on Magic and Old Problems of Definition," *History of Religions* 43.1 (2003): 50. It should be noted that Johnston herself makes a convincing plea for the need to attempt a definition of magic. For a valuable critique of analogous debates about "religion" and the danger of exaggerating the importance of definitional issues, see Steve Bruce, "Defining Religion: A Practical Response," *International Review of Sociology: Revue Internationale de Sociologie* 21.1 (2011): 107–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2011.544190>.
50. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, 18.
51. Bruce Kapferer, "Introduction: Outside All Reason — Magic, Sorcery and Epistemology in Anthropology," in *Beyond Rationalism: Rethinking Magic, Witchcraft, and Sorcery*, ed. Bruce Kapferer (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2003), 1.
52. For helpful surveys of the contours of the debate, see Graham Cunningham, *Religion and Magic: Approaches and Theories*

(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg, eds., "Defining Magic: A Reader" (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012); Rebecca Stein and Philip L. Stein, *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 3rd ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2011); Murray Wax and Rosalie Wax, "The Notion of Magic," *Current Anthropology* 4.5 (1963): 495–518. It would be invidious to single out any particular contributions, but the recent reflexive turn has revitalised the definitional debate considerably. See, for example, Susan Greenwood, *The Anthropology of Magic* (New York, NY: Berg, 2009); Galina Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope: Healing and Magic in Contemporary Russia* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2006); Harry G. West, *Ethnographic Sorcery* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

53. For critical surveys of theories of magic, see Cunningham, *Religion and Magic: Approaches and Theories*; Ariel Glucklich, *The End of Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3–81; Malcolm B. Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), 39–54; Daniel Lawrence O'Keefe, *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic* (New York, NY: Random House, 1983); Tambiah, *Magic, Science and Religion and the Scope of Rationality*; Wax and Wax, "The Notion of Magic."
54. Essentialist or substantive definitions of magic assume that there is something distinctive about magic, in particular characteristics that distinguish it from religion or science. Such definitions have been put forward, albeit in very different ways, by, for example, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937); James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1890); Mischa Titiev, "A Fresh Approach to the Problem of Magic and Religion," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 16.3 (1960): 292–98, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3629032>; Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1871). See also more recent studies, such as Greenwood, *The Anthropology of Magic*.
55. Functionalist definitions emphasise the social or psychological functions of magic, such as that found in Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion, and Other Essays* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1948). Frustratingly Durkheim, the leading functionalist, did not provide a definition of magic although he wrote much about it. For him, magic was essentially the opposite of religion. For example,

for Durkheim religions create social life and form moral communities but magic is antithetical to such social and moral life. See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915), 42–49.

56. Locative-relational definitions of magic define magic relative to something else, and its concomitant location. Mauss provides a good example of such a definition:

A magical rite is any rite which does not play a part in organised cult [...]. We do not define magic in terms of the structure of its rites, but by the circumstances in which these rites occur, which in turn determine the place they occupy in the totality of social customs. (Marcel Mauss, *Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie* [Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1902], 24)

57. The notion that magic is a stage in human development is found in Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion.*; Tylor, *Primitive Culture*; Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich, trans. E. Fischoff (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978). For a survey of such evolutionary approaches, see Styers, *Making Magic*.
58. Developmental interpretations of magic can take a number of forms. For example, it is often argued that "magical thinking" — the conviction that a person's thoughts directly affect the world — is particularly associated with bereavement and childhood. See, for example, Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2006); Jean Piaget, *The Child's Conception of the World*, trans. Joan Tomlinson and Andrew Tomlinson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1929). Lewis has also suggested that conceptualisations of magic may alter over the general course of a person's life, as a result of both individual experience and the effect of the different roles that accompany various phases of adulthood. To put it succinctly, we need to understand magic in a way that accounts for the fact that "people change their opinions as they grow older". Gilbert Lewis, "The Look of Magic," *Man* 21.3 (1986): 414, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2803094>.
59. The term "intellectualist" is one particularly used of James Frazer and Edward Tylor. See Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion.*; Tylor, *Primitive Culture*. However, it is also employed for more recent scholars, such as Robin Horton. See Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

- 1997). "Intellectualist" refers to those scholars who view magic (and religion) as something employed by people to explain puzzling aspects of the world about them; something that is "essentially rational" even though it provides explanations that are "crude and fallacious". A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses* (London: Cohen & West, 1961), 20. See Cunningham, *Religion and Magic: Approaches and Theories*, 15.
60. Although one of the founding figures in functionalism, Malinowski's understanding of magic can also be termed instrumentalist. For him, magic was "a practical art consisting of acts which are only means to a definite end expected to follow later on". Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, 68.
 61. This is the label given by Ogden to conceptualisations of magic that are derived from the use of one or more magical terms within a chosen society. See Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), xviii–xix.
 62. Tambiah, for example, argues, using the work of Austin, that magic is a kind of "performative utterance", that is an illocutionary act which itself changes reality. See John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); Tambiah, *Magic, Science and Religion and the Scope of Rationality*; Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," *Man* 3.2 (1968): 175–208, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2798500>.
 63. For example, Marrett understood magic to arise "from the emotion of tension and is cathartic or stimulating, providing relief or encouragement when technical methods are inadequate". Cunningham, *Religion and Magic: Approaches and Theories*, 24. See R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1914). For a contemporary example of such an approach, see Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope*.
 64. For example, Kapferer, "Introduction: Outside All Reason — Magic, Sorcery and Epistemology in Anthropology."
 65. For example, Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938); Paul Stoller, *Fusion of the Worlds: An Ethnography of Possession among the Songhay of Niger* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989); West, *Ethnographic Sorcery*.
 66. For example, Greenwood, *The Anthropology of Magic*.
 67. For example, Glucklich, *The End of Magic*.
 68. The classic summary of this position can be found in William J.

Goode, "Magic and Religion: A Continuum," *Ethnos* 14.2 (1949): 172–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.1949.9980699>.

Although very critical of the motivations that lay behind those who insisted, for ideological reasons, on a distinction between "magic" and "religion", he still found that such a distinction had analytical utility. Aune's influential study of magic in antiquity assumes a traditional, essentialist, dichotomy between magic and religion, despite claims to the contrary in his text. David E. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. II.23.2*, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 1507–57. This is something that Hutton has rightly noted. See Ronald Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 103. For a significant critique of attempts to distinguish "magic" and "religion", see Dorothy Hammond, "Magic: A Problem in Semantics," *American Anthropologist* 72.6 (1970): 1349–56, <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1970.72.6.02a00080>. For criticisms of essentialist and substantive interpretations see, for example, H. S. Versnel, "Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion," *Numen* 38.2 (1991): 177–97, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852791X00114>; Smith, "Trading Places."

69. Smith, "Trading Places," 227. To be fair to Smith, his remarks relate specifically to the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (ibid. 222) and he is not explicitly claiming that his observations have any saliency beyond the analysis of that corpus of texts (however, as with much of what Smith has to say, they have been understood to have more wide-ranging implications). The "miniaturisation" of ritual could be said to be a characteristic of everyday private and domestic devotion in antiquity and not something that should be seen as an unusual or distinguishing feature of the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*. For Roman domestic religion, see J. R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C. – A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Annemarie Kaufmann-Heinimann, "Religion in the House," in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 188–201; David Gerald Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion: A Study of the Roman Household Deities and Their Shrines at Pompeii and Herculaneum" (PhD thesis, University of Maryland, 1972); Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion: The Archaeology of Roman Popular Art," in *Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture*, ed. Ray B. Browne (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press, 1980), 88–104; Orr, "Roman Domestic Religion: The Evidence of the Household Shrines," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt, II.16.2*, ed. Wolfgang Haase and Hildgard Temporini

(Berlin: De Gruyter, 1978), 1557–91. For the use of statuettes in private and domestic devotion, see Plutarch, *Sulla* 29.6; Ammianus Marcellinus 22.13.3; Apuleius, *Apol.* 63.2.

70. As, for example, Morton Smith rightly observes:

Private dealings with supernatural beings make up most of what we call "magic" as well as what we call "private religion". There is no clear line between the two. When we compare avowedly religious texts and reports of religious practices with the texts of the magical papyri and the practices they prescribe, we find the same goals stated and the same means used. For instance, spells for destruction of an enemy are commonly supposed to be magical, but there are many in the Psalms. The cliché, that the religious man petitions the gods while the magician tries to compel them, is simply false. (Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* [San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978], 69)

71. The trenchant criticisms of functionalist definitions of religion made by Bruce are applicable to functionalist definitions of magic. See Bruce, "Defining Religion," 111–12.
72. James A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008), 90.
73. See Bronislaw Malinowski, "Culture," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* IV:638.
74. See S. F. Nadel, "Malinowski on Magic and Religion," in *Man and Culture: An Evaluation of the Work of Bronislaw Malinowski*, ed. Raymond Firth (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), 189–208.
75. For example, Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 24–25; Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 24. Such a perspective is succinctly described by Crossan: "Religion is official and approved magic; magic is unofficial and unapproved religion. More simply: 'we' practice religion, 'they' practice magic." John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 304.
76. Whether that be religious or secular and scientific. See Olof Pettersson, "Magic — Religion: Some Marginal Notes to an Old Problem," *Ethnos* 22.3 (1957): 109–19; Tambiah, *Magic, Science and Religion and the Scope of Rationality*; Styers, *Making Magic*.
77. A point made by Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History*, 62.
78. A similar point is made in Smith, "Trading Places."

79. Evans-Pritchard's study of the Azande provides a famous example of this. According to his account, the Azande possess no substantive religious beliefs, rituals or institutions, relative to which their magic can be defined. See Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*.
80. Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur*, 312.
81. A point made by O'Keefe, *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic*, 10. For analysis of Weber's understanding of magic, see Stefan Breuer, "Magie, Zauber, Entzauberung," in *Max Webers >>Religionssystematik<<*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Martin Riesebrodt (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 119–30. The same, as we have already noted, could also be said of Durkheim.
82. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, 138. He suggested the same for the term "religion".
83. See, for example, Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith, eds., "Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power" (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1999), 1–6; Smith, "Trading Places." For a criticism of this practice see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History*, 61; C. A. Hoffman, "Fiat Magia," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Allan Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 179–94.
84. Alan Dundes, "Wet and Dry, the Evil Eye: An Essay in Indo-European and Semitic Worldview," in *The Evil Eye: A Casebook*, ed. Alan Dundes (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 258.
85. Rodney Stark, "Reconceptualizing Religion, Magic, and Science," *Review of Religious Research* 43.2 (2001): 102, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512057>.
86. Versnel, "Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion," 181. Although Versnel's words were published over thirty years ago, they accurately describe the current state of scholarship in the field.
87. Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur*, 106. Although, as Hutton has noted, in his useful survey of the classical scholarship on the subject, a form of the traditional, essentialist, dichotomy between magic and religion, in which the former is seen as manipulative and coercive and the latter supplicatory, has persisted, even in works by authors who have explicitly rejected it. See Hutton, *Witches, Druids and King Arthur*, 98–103. See also Versnel, "Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion."

88. See Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 148.
89. See, for example, Paulus, *Sent.* 5.23.14–19.
90. Attilio Mastrocinque, “Creating One’s Own Religion: Intellectual Choices,” in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 387. Although this does not mean that there were not a number of theories of magic in antiquity, as Graf has demonstrated in Fritz Graf, “Theories of Magic in Antiquity,” in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Allan Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 93–104.
91. Apuleius, *Apol.* 25. Indeed, as Rives has persuasively argued, it was precisely through such trials as that of Apuleius that definitions of magic were thrashed out and developed over time. See Rives, “Magic, Religion and Law,” 65. See also Rives, “Magic in Roman Law.”
92. For the Latin terminology associated with magic, see Eli Edward Burris, “The Terminology of Witchcraft,” *Classical Philology* 31.2 (1936): 137–45, <https://doi.org/10.2307/264710>. See also Jan N. Bremmer, “The Birth of the Term ‘Magic,’” in *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 1–11.
93. See Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, xviii–xix.
94. For polythetic definitions see Rodney Needham, “Polythetic Classification: Convergence and Consequences,” *Man* 10.3 (1975): 349–69, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2799807>. For the use of polythetic definitions in the study of religion see especially Jonathan Z. Smith, “Fences and Neighbors: Some Contours of Early Judaism,” in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1–18; Brian C. Wilson, “From the Lexical to the Polythetic: A Brief History of the Definition of Religion,” in *What Is Religion?: Origins, Definitions, and Explanations*, ed. Thomas A. Idinopoulos and Brian C. Wilson (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 141–62. For the use of polythetic definitions of magic in antiquity, see Rives, “Magic in Roman Law,” 317; Versnel, “Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion,” 182–87.
95. See, for example, Morton Beckner, *The Biological Way of Thought*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1959), 22. Whilst *monothetic* definitions identify one or more distinguishing feature as necessary for classification, *polythetic* definitions include a number of features which, by themselves, are neither necessary or sufficient

but are commonly occurring amongst a classification. Smith is wrong to maintain that polythetic definitions retain "the notion of necessary but abandoned the notion of sufficient criteria for admission to a class". Smith, "Fences and Neighbors," 4. In polythetic definitions there are no characteristics which need to be found in every member of a class. It should also be noted that polythetic definitions have come in for significant criticism in the biological sciences. See, for example, J. P. Sutcliffe, "On the Logical Necessity and Priority of a Monothetic Conception of Class, and on the Consequent Inadequacy of Polythetic Accounts of Category and Categorization," in *New Approaches in Classification and Data Analysis*, ed. Edwin Diday et al. (Berlin: Springer, 1994), 55–63.

96. Wilson, "From the Lexical to the Polythetic: A Brief History of the Definition of Religion," 158.
97. That is, "the insider's or native's perspective of reality". David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-Step*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2010), 20.
98. Though any claim to provide an emic account, even of the most rudimentary kind, is obviously not without its problems. See Thomas N. Headland, Kenneth Pike, and Marvin Harris, eds., *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate* (London: Sage, 1991).
99. Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 3.1026; Apuleius, *Metam.* 3.20, *Apol.* 42; Cicero, *Pro Cluentio* 194; Diodorus Siculus 4.52; Horace, *Epodi* 5; Hippocrates, *De morbo sacro* 1.38; Ovid, *Metam.* 7.179, *Amores* 1.8.1–20. See H. G. Kippenberg, "Magic in Roman Civil Discourse: Why Rituals Could Be Illegal," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and H. G. Kippenberg, *Studies in the History of Religions* 75 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 137–64.
100. Apuleius, *Apol.* 26, 38; Eusebius, *Contra Hieroclem* 2.27; Lucian, *Philopseudes* 12, 35, *Dialogi meretricii* 288–89; *Menippus* 9; Virgil, *Ecl.* 8.64–109.
101. For human sacrifice see Cicero, *In Vatinius* 14; Horace, *Epod.* 5; *CIL* VI.19747; Paulus, *Sent.* 5.23.14–19; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.11; cf. also Livy 25.1. Human sacrifice had been an element of the public cult of Rome, although this had ceased by the second century BCE. See Zsuzsanna Várhelyi, "The Specters of Roman Imperialism: The Live Burials of Gauls and Greeks at Rome," *Classical Antiquity* 26.2 (2007): 277–304, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ca.2007.26.2.277>.
102. As, for example, Libo Drusus and Claudia Pulchra were accused of so doing (Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.27–32, 4.52).

103. For example, Apuleius, *Apol.* 26; *Metam.* 1.8, 2.21; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Alex.* 3–4; Lucian, *Men.* 6; Maximus Tyrius, *Dissertationes* 8.2; Dio Cassius 56.23; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4.25. For a comprehensive treatment of different magical specialists in the Graeco-Roman world, see Daniel Ogden, *Night's Black Agents: Witches Wizards and the Dead in the Ancient World* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2008); Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 9–145.
104. For example, Lucan, *Phars.* 6.413–507; Ovid, *Her.* 6.83–94.
105. For example, Calypso in Homer, *Od.* 1.11–19, 5.151–58. See also Lucan, *Phars.* 6.624–830; Lucian, *Philops.* 17, 22–24; Ovid, *Metam.* 7.159–321; Pseudo-Quintilian, *Declamationes maiores* 10.19; *Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum* IX.72.110–21.
106. See, for example, Apuleius, *Metam.* 3.16–17; Cicero, *Clu.* 194; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 2.22; Lucan, *Phars.* 6.570; Ovid, *Am.* 1.8.13; *Metam.* 7.193; Tibullus, *Elegiae* 1.2.42–66.
107. Ovid, *Metam.* 7.179; Petronius, *Sat.* 61–62. The period around a full moon could also be significant. See Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 6.14; Lucian, *Philops.* 14.
108. For lunar eclipses, associated with the magical practice of "drawing down the moon"; see Plutarch, *Mor.* 145cd; Zenobius, *Epitome proverbiorum Tarrhaei et Didymi* 404. See Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 236–37.
109. Pliny, *Nat.* 28.27.92–106; Ovid, *Metam.* 7.238–93; Horace, *Epod.* 5; Apuleius, *Metam.* 2.21–30, 3.17; *Apol.* 30; Lucan, *Phars.* 6.507–830. See also Cyranides.
110. See Apuleius, *Metam.* 3.17; Ovid, *Fasti* 2.533–638; Petronius, *Sat.* 131; Theocritus, *Id.* 2.
111. See, for example, Apuleius, *Metam.* 3.15–25; Horace, *Epod.* 17; Lucan, *Phars.* 6.413–587; Lucian, *Philops.* 33–36.
112. For example, Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 3.1026–1062, 1191–1224; Hippocrates, *Morb. Sacr.* 4.32; Horace, *Sat.* 1.8; Lucian, *Men.* 9, *Philops.* 22–24; Ovid, *Metam.* 7.174, 194; Theocritus, *Id.* 2; Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.2.42–66. For *defixiones* invoking Hecate that date from the early Roman empire, see Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 180–84.
113. Apuleius, *Metam.* 3.17, *Apol.* 63; Horace, *Epod.* 5; *Sat.* 1.8; Lucan, *Phars.* 6.624–830; Tertullian, *De anima* 56–57. Magic was not necessarily associated with demons in the early Roman empire. The

relationship between *daimones* and humans in the classical world was an ambivalent one. For a survey, see Valerie Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe 2 (London: Athlone, 1999), 281–92. Although demons could be associated with magic (for example, Apuleius, *Apol.* 43), and equated with the spirits of the dead (for example, Apuleius, *De deo Socratico* 15), they only became prominent in the broader culture of the empire, and understood as consistently malign, as a result of the influence of Judaism and emergent Christianity, traditions that also helped to introduce angels into the eclectic repertoire of supernatural powers employed by magicians, something evident from the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*. For demonology in the early Roman Empire, see Frederick E. Brenk, "In the Light of the Moon: Demonology in the Early Imperial Period," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. II.16.3*, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986), 2068–2145. For early Christianity, see Samuel Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament*, 2nd ed., Symbolae Osloenses Fasciculi Suppletorii 20 (Oslo: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1966).

114. For the common picture that magic was harmful see, for example, Apuleius, *Metam.* 2.21–30; Petronius, *Sat.* 63; Plato, *Respublica* 364b–e; *Leges* 933a–b, e; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.27–32, 4.52; *CIL* VI.19747. The notion that magicians were harmful both to individuals and the state is evident in the regular expulsion of practitioners of magic from Rome, in which magicians found themselves lumped with other subversives and troublemakers perceived to threaten the peace of the city, including Jews, Christians, astrologers, worshippers of Isis, fans of charioteers and pantomime artists. For the expulsion of magicians and others, see Dio Cassius 49.43.5, 52.36.1–2, 57.18.5a, 60.6.6–7; Josephus, *A.J.* 18.63–64; Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 159–61; Suetonius, *Tib.* 36.1, *Divus Claudius* 25; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.85.4–5; Valerius Maximus 1.3.3. See MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 95–127. Love magic might be thought an exception of a kind, but it was generally considered harmful to the victim. Such magic was believed to be able to drive the object of desire mad (see Plutarch, *Mor.* 139a; Suetonius, *Cal.* 50; cf. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 21; Ovid, *Metam.* 9.101–238) and that those "dragged together by the magical twisting of threads" were forced into lives contrary to fate (Lucan, *Phars.* 6.434; see also Apuleius, *Metam.* 1.5–19, *Apol.* 41) — not necessarily a happy state of affairs. Those practising it faced

severe punishment (Paulus, *Sent.* 5.23.14). For a comprehensive discussion of love magic, see Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Forms of magic associated with warding off or obtaining relief from sickness might also appear to be an exception. However, we must be careful to note that many practices that might seem, to a modern interpreter, self-evidently magical, were not considered such in antiquity and did not, in most cases, suffer from legal or social prohibitions, something we have noted in our earlier discussion of Cato the Elder's use of an incantation to deal with a dislocation (*Agr.* 160). For a therapeutic practice to be judged magical it required an additional association with malign forces and nefarious activities and practitioners. This distinction can be seen clearly in Manichaean sources. Although Mani had explicitly prohibited the use of magic in his religion (*Kephalaia* 6.31.24b–33), Manichaeans had no compunction in using "magical" practices to obtain healing probably because, as Canepa has argued, they did not view activities of a therapeutic kind as proscribed. Matthew P. Canepa, "The Art and Ritual of Manichaean Magic: Text, Object and Image from the Mediterranean to Central Asia," in *Objects in Motion: The Circulation of Religion and Sacred Objects in the Late Antique and Byzantine World*, ed. Hallie Meredith, BAR International Series 2247 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011), 75. However, cf. Iain Gardner and Samuel N. C. Lieu, eds., "Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 278–80.

115. For example, the list found in Scott Shauf, *Theology as History, History as Theology: Paul in Ephesus in Acts 19*, BZNW 133 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 184–88.
116. For example, Iamblichus' *Babyloniaka* in Photius, *Bibliotheca* 75b (this is not a reference to Iamblichus the Neoplatonist); Lucian, *Philops.* 11–13; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Alex.* 11.
117. See, for example, Lucian, *Philops.* 33–36; Heliodorus. *Aeth.* 3.16.1–4, 6.12–15.
118. See Oliver Phillips, "The Witches' Thessaly," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Allan Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 378–85. For example, Sosiphanes, *Meleager* fr. 6 n. 2; Apuleius, *Metam.* 1.5–19, 2.21; Horace, *Epod.* 5; Lucan, *Phars.* 6.434; Plautus, *Amphitruo* 1043–44; Pliny, *Nat.* 30.2.6. "Most Romans of the Principate knew Thessaly chiefly through literature as a place of magic and of demonic women." Glen W. Bowersock, "Zur

Geschichte des römischen Thessaliens," *Rheinisches Museum* 108 (1965): 277.

119. See Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of Its Historical Setting*, SNTSMS 63 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Chester C. McCown, "The Ephesia Grammata in Popular Belief," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 54 (1923): 128–40, <https://doi.org/10.2307/282847>.
120. For the reputation of Memphis as a key centre for magic, see Apuleius, *Metam.* 2.28; Jerome, *Vit. Hil.* 21; Lucian, *Philops.* 34; Lucan, *Phars.* 6.459.
121. Iamblichus, *Babyloniaka* in Photius, *Bib.* 74b; Lucian, *Philops.* 11–13; Scriptores Historiae Augustae, *Macrinus* 19. Although often included with various kinds of sorcerer in Roman legislation, Chaldeans were particularly associated with astrology in its most subversive form and were regularly expelled from Rome because of their ability, amongst other things, to ascertain the date of the emperor's death (for example, Tacitus *Ann.* 12.52). For astrology in antiquity, see Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London: Routledge, 1994). It is important to note that by the early Roman Empire "Chaldean" had ceased to have a clear ethnic referent and had become a synonym for a type of seditious magician, a process that had begun in the late Republic.
122. For example, Lucian, *Philops.* 13–15; Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae* 28–29.
123. For example, Apuleius, *Apol.* 26; Pliny, *Nat.* 30.2.3, 30.2.8.
124. For example, Apuleius, *Metam.* 2.28; Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 3.16; Lucian, *Philops.* 33–36; Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Alex.* 1–7, 12. See Robert K. Ritner, "Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire: The Demotic Spells and Their Religious Context," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II.18.5*, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 3333–79.
125. For example, Apuleius, *Apol.* 90; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.26; Pliny, *Nat.* 30.2.11.
126. The Marsi were an Italian people particularly associated with magic (see Pliny, *Nat.* 7.2.15; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 16.11.1). It is often said that ethnic groups associated with magic were "exotic" or "foreign" in the empire and this characteristic played a significant part in the creation of their magical identity. Whilst there is some truth in this, such an evaluation is clearly dependent upon

perspective, something which was obviously not uniform: an early imperial Egyptian, for example, was not exotic to another Egyptian, nor were the Marsi, an Italian tribe, particularly exotic to most Romans. For the ethnicity of magicians, see Ogden, *Night's Black Agents*, 77–114.

127. See especially Jean-Benoît Clerc, *Homines magici: étude sur la sorcellerie et la magie dans la société romaine impériale*, Publications universitaires européennes. Série III, Histoire et sciences auxiliaires de l'histoire 673 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995); Christopher A. Faraone, "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3–32. See also Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 210–26; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*. The digression in Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.39 is particularly telling in this respect.
128. Apuleius, *Metam.* 3.15; Lucan, *Phars.* 6.434–506; Pliny, *Nat.* 28.27.104, 30.5.14; Libanius, *Declamationes* 41; Pseudo-Quintilian, *Decl. mai.* 10.
129. See, for example, LXX Deut 32.17; 1 Cor 10.20–21; Gal 4.8–11; Justin, *1 Apologia* 14. See Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity"; Naomi Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (London: Routledge, 2001), 16–26. For general prohibitions on magic in Judaism and Christianity see Exod 22.18; Lev 19.26, 31, 20.27; Deut 18.10–11; 1 Sam 28; Mal 3.5; *m. Avot* 2.7; cf. Philo, *Spec.* 3.101–2; *b. Sanh.* 67a; Acts 19.18–20; Gal 5.20; 2 Tim. 3.13; Rev. 9.21, 21.8, 22.15; *Didache* 2.2, 3.4, 5.1; *Barnabas* 20.1; Ignatius, *Ad Ephesios* 19.3; Hippolytus, *Traditio Apostolica* 16.21, 22.
130. Apuleius, *Metam.* 3.17–18.
131. Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.69. See also Suetonius, *Caligula* 3.3 and Dio Cassius 57.18.9.
132. Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.
133. Apuleius, *Metam.* 11.1. See Plutarch, *De Iside* 8.
134. See Stavros Frangoulidis, *Witches, Isis and Narrative: Approaches to Magic in Apuleius' "Metamorphoses"* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 5.
135. Which, in the case of Frangoulidis, is never stated.
136. For discussion of this much-studied text, see Rives, "Magic in Roman Law"; Rives, "Magic, Religion and Law". For another commentary on this law, see *Digesta* 48.8.2. Cf. also Cicero, *Clu.* 148.

137. The reference to *honestiores* and *humiliores* in this text is characteristic of a fundamental distinction between the treatment of different social classes in Roman law. For the classic study of this, see Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).
138. Paulus, *Sent.* 5.23.15–18. The translation is from Rives, “Magic in Roman Law,” 329.
139. Apuleius, *Apol.* 26. A similar distinction is drawn by Philo in *Spec.* 3.93–103. See Bremmer, “The Birth of the Term ‘Magic.’”
140. For oneirology see, for example, Cicero, *De divinatione* 1.23.46; Dio Cassius, 49.7; Herodotus, 1.107–8, 120, 128, 7.19; Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales* 4.5.2. For astrology, see Matt 2.1; Justinus, *Epitome Historiarum Trogi Pompeii* 1.1.7–10 (although this reputation is probably a result of a popular conflation of ideas about *magi* and Chaldeans). For other sorts of divination see, for example, Strabo, *Geographica* 16.2.39. For journeys to the underworld, see Lucian, *Men.* 6–8, and journeys to the heavens and hell, see Kirdēr’s vision. Philippe Gignoux, ed., *Quatre inscriptions de Kirdir: textes et concordances*, Cahiers de Studia Iranica 9 (Leuven: Peeters, 1991); Shaul Shaked, “Quest and Visionary Journeys in Sasanian Iran,” in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 65–86. For the cultural representation of *magi* in Greek and Roman literature, see A. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 387–403. See also Michael Becker, “Magoi–Astrologers, Ecstatics, Deceitful Prophets: New Testament Understanding in Jewish and Pagan Context,” in *A Kind of Magic: Understanding Magic in the New Testament and Its Religious Environment*, ed. Michael Labahn and Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 87–106.
141. Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 3.16.
142. Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 162.
143. Waegeman, *Amulet and Alphabet*, 7.
144. Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 162.
145. See Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, 232–33.
146. For Nigidius Figulus, see Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, 170–72. See Apuleius, *Apol.* 42; Cicero, *Timaes* 1.1; Suetonius, *Aug.* 94. Jerome refers to Nigidius Figulus as a

- "Pythagoricus et magus". See Jerome, *Chronicon Eusebii a Graeco Latine redditum et continuatum* 156 H. However, Pythagoreanism did not necessarily have a positive reputation. Cicero, for example, could accuse Vatinius, a self-proclaimed Pythagorean, of practising necromancy and sacrificing young boys (Cicero, *Vat.* 14).
147. See Wilburn, *Materia Magica*, 264.
 148. Mary Douglas, "Heathen Darkness," in *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1975), 81.
 149. There is much to gain here from examining the question in the light of cognate discussions about the value of speaking about "religion" in pre-modern cultures. See, for example, the critical analysis of the emergence of "religion" as a historical category in Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). However, cf. Bruce, "Defining Religion." The interdisciplinary study of "religion" at Çatalhöyük is also helpful for rethinking fundamental assumptions. See Ian Hodder, ed., "Religion in the Emergence of Civilization: Çatalhöyük as a Case Study" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). It is common to speak of religion as "embedded" in all aspects of life in the ancient world, as we can see, for example, in Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1:143. However, this raises significant theoretical problems, usefully detailed in Brent Nongbri, "Dislodging 'Embedded' Religion: A Brief Note on a Scholarly Trope," *Numen* 55 (2008): 440–60. And it cannot be said of magic in antiquity, which seems to have been largely limited to agonistic contexts.
 150. Homer, *Od.* 10.133–405 and 569–74.
 151. Homer, *Od.* 1.11–9 and 5.151–58.
 152. Despite allegedly summoning up Odysseus from the dead to gain information about the Trojan war (Philostratus, *Heroicus* 43) and also being summoned up from the dead himself by the grammarian Apion in order to settle the hotly disputed question of his origins (Pliny, *Nat.* 30.6.18).
 153. It could be edited to include even more magic. See, for example, Julius Africanus, *Kestoi* 18 (*PGM* XXIII.1–70).
 154. Pliny, *Nat.* 30.2.5.
 155. For example, Apuleius, *Metam.* 1.5–19, 2.21–30, 3.15–25, 9.29–31;

- Lucian, *Philops.* 11–17, 22, 30–31, 33–36; *Dial. meretr.* 288–89; *Men.* 2, 6–10, 21–22; Petronius, *Sat.* 61–63, 131.
156. See Graham Anderson, *Fairytale in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 2002), 103. See also Debbie Felton, *Haunted Greece and Rome: Ghost Stories from Classical Antiquity* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999).
 157. Stein and Stein, *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 172.
 158. For "moral panics", see Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1980). For moral panics, witchcraft and the law, see Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*, 2nd ed. (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 168–96; David Lemmings and Claire Walker, eds., *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
 159. Which seem to have been created, in part, in response to activities ascribed to those involved in the Bacchic "Conspiracy" of 186 BCE. See Livy 39.8–19; *ILS* 18.
 160. Geoffrey Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), 143.
 161. The numbers killed in East Anglia probably amounted to a few hundred. James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 126–27. For the context, see Malcolm Gaskill, *Witchfinders: A Seventeenth-Century English Tragedy* (London: John Murray, 2005). The number of those executed for sorcery in the early Roman empire is difficult to gauge but although we hear about individual trials, such as those of Libo Drusus (Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.27–32), Claudia Pulchra (Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.52), Lucius Pituanus and Publius Marcius (Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.32), Marcia Servilia (Tacitus, *Ann.* 16.30–33), Apuleius of Madaura (*Apol.*), and Apollonius of Tyana (Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 8.1–31), these are rare and evidence of the conviction and execution of magicians and witches in any numbers is almost non-existent. For a survey of such trials, see Markéta Melounová, "Trials with Religious and Political Charges from the Principate to the Dominate," *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 17.2 (2012): 117–30. A fourth-century source, *Chronographus Anni CCCLIII*, claims that Tiberius put to death 130 sorcerers in his reign, but even if this is reliable it is, according to the source itself, something that was unprecedented. See T. Mommsen, ed., *Chronographus Anni CCCLIII* (Berlin: s.n., 1892), 142–48. It is possible that Rome went through its own

paroxysms and moral panics brought about by fears of witchcraft but aside from the sensational case of the events surrounding the death of Germanicus (Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.69; Suetonius. *Cal.* 3.3; Dio Cassius 57.18.9), which did not result in any executions (Piso and the *venefica* allegedly committing suicide), there is no evidence of this in the early Roman empire. Our best candidate for such an event, if it is reliable, involves the Republic, and consists of Livy's claim that shortly before the repression of the Bacchic worship in 186 BCE — an extremely unusual event in Roman history — 5,000 people were put to death for *veneficia* (Livy 39.41 and 40.43). See John A. North, "Religious Toleration in Republican Rome," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 205 (1979): 85–103; Sarolta A. Takács, "Politics and Religion in the Bacchanalian Affair of 186 B.C.E.," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 100 (2000): 301–10, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3185221>. We hear of similar panics in the later empire, notably under Constantius II and Valens; see *Codex theodosianus* 9.16.4–6; Ammianus Marcellinus 19.12, 29.1–2.

162. The population of East Anglia was about half a million, out of a total population in England of 5 million. E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 210. The population of the early Roman empire was about 50 million. Keith Hopkins, "Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire (200 B.C.-A.D. 400)," *Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980): 118, <https://doi.org/10.2307/299558>. However, cf. Bruce W. Frier, "More Is Worse: Some Observations on the Population of the Roman Empire," in *Debating Roman Demography*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 139–60.
163. Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.34.
164. Apuleius, *Apol.* 26. A point also made by Downing. See Downing, "Magic and Scepticism," 210. However, Downing does not note that both Apuleius and Apollonius said much the same.
165. As Gager, for example, extrapolates from the reference to the use of amulets by Jewish soldiers found in 2 Macc 12.39–40: "To be sure, 2 Maccabees does not offer the sort of hard demographic data preferred by modern social scientists, but the fact remains that in this randomly chosen sample of ancient Jews, every one wore an amulet, as did virtually every sensible person of the time." Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 219. Gager seems to have ignored the rhetorical context. It is just as likely that the claim about the use of amulets is part of an attempt by the

author to explain why these particular Jews had died in battle (the amulets are referred to as "idols of Jamnia"; cf. Exod 23.24; 32; Num 25). It tells us more about the theology of the author, and his hostility to idolatry, than the practices of a "randomly chosen sample of Jews".

166. Ovid, *Am.* 1.8.7; Petronius, *Sat.* 131; Virgil, *Ecl.* 8.74–77.
167. Amongst the plethora of jewellery found there were a number of charms but none of these contained elements that Romans would have categorized as magical. The only possible exceptions are those that took the form of representations of Fascinus, the divine, and often winged, phallus, the *medicus invidiae* which was thought to protect against the evil eye (Pliny, *Nat.* 28.7.39). However, Fascinus was a public cult, most famously venerated by the Vestal Virgins, and representations of Fascinus functioned as a general apotropaic image, protecting from harm of any kind, and especially that which resulted from envy. It was not in itself considered magical nor necessarily indicated anxiety about the possible presence of magic.
168. See Fergus Millar, "Epigraphy," in *Sources for Ancient History*, ed. Michael Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 91. The graffiti from Pompeii is overwhelmingly scatological or erotic. See, for example, *CIL* VI.1679, 1751, 3932, 3951, 4523, 5092, 7716, 8442, 8767, 8898, 10070, 10488, 10619, 10675, 10677, 10678. There is nothing magical about the so-called "Magical Squares" found in Pompeii (*CIL* VI. 8297, 8623). For the graffiti, see Helen Henrietta Tanzer, *The Common People of Pompeii: A Study of the Graffiti* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939). Cf. also Jennifer A. Baird and Claire Taylor, eds., *Ancient Graffiti in Context* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Antonio Varone, *Erotica Pompeiana: Love Inscriptions on the Walls of Pompeii* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2002). Likewise, there is nothing magical about the so-called "House of the Magical Rites", and it appears to have been so named because of the presence of two hands of Sabazios, the Phrygian and Thracian sky-god. To refer to such objects as "magical" is to engage in the error of "Classicism" and to confuse these objects with the so-called "Hand of Glory" of later witchcraft traditions. See Mastrocinque, *Kronos, Shiva, and Asklepios*, 4; Albert H. Tricomi, "The Severed Hand in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 44.2 (2004): 347–58, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2004.0023>.
169. Wilburn, *Materia Magica*, 15.
170. Wilburn, *Materia Magica*, 20. Wilburn explains this dearth of

archaeological evidence as a result of "the vagaries of preservation, a desire for secrecy on the part of the practitioner, and the tendency of rituals to destroy or use up the material components of a spell." Wilburn, *Materia Magica*, 25. Whilst these factors no doubt affected the record, they do not account for it. He seems unwilling to accept that the lack of evidence might well be an indication that magic was, in fact, *not* widely practised.

171. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 219.
172. For the invisibility amulet see Cyranides, 1.15.33–37. Waegeman, *Amulet and Alphabet*, 115. See also the invisibility lotion found in PGM I.222–31 and the famous ring of Gyges in Plato, *Rep.* 359d–60b. For a discussion of invisibility spells, see Paul A. Mirecki, "Manichaean Allusions to Ritual and Magic: Spells for Invisibility in the Coptic Kephalaia," in *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in Manichaeism and Its World*, ed. Paul Mirecki and Jason BeDuhn (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 173–80.
173. For an amulet promising relief from migraine, see Cyranides, 1.16.38–42. Waegeman, *Amulet and Alphabet*, 119. For an amulet promising relief from indigestion, see Cyranides 1.9.12–16. Waegeman, *Amulet and Alphabet*, 71. For an amulet promising to prevent drunkenness, see Cyranides, 1.8.25–28. Waegeman, *Amulet and Alphabet*, 65. For amulets promising to make the wearer popular and lucky, see Cyranides, 1.5.27–31 and 1.4.45–61. Waegeman, *Amulet and Alphabet*, 41, 35. See also PGM XIV.309–334.
174. See Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, 85; David Jordan, "A Survey of Greek Defixiones Not Included in the Special Corpora," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 26.2 (1985): 151–97. I would like to thank Andrew Wilson for drawing my attention to this *defixio*.
175. Paul Roberts, *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (London: British Museum Press, 2013), 290–91.
176. The charms were made of a variety of different materials that originated from all over the empire and beyond. Roberts, *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum*, 291.
177. See, for example, the discussions in Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion, 1994), 7–24; Fiona Parrott, "Death, Memory and Collecting: Creating the Conditions for Ancestralisation in South London Households," in *Unpacking the Collection*, ed. Sarah Byrne et al. (New York, NY: Springer, 2011), 289–305.

178. Ian Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture* (London: Sage, 2007), vi.
179. Hildred Geertz, "An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, I," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6.1 (1975): 83.
180. Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
181. Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–94.
182. Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture*, 4.
183. For example, Plutarch, *Vitae Parallelae*, *Pericles*. 38. Cf. Diogenes Laertius 10.
184. See, for example, Soranus, *Gyn.* 3.42. Galen's position seems somewhat more complex. He was generally dismissive of amulets. Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 268–70. However, he did allow for the possibility that some might have an effect by virtue of the materials used, though carving amulets into particular shapes was, in his judgement, pointless. Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 269. See also P. T. Keyser, "Science and Magic in Galen's Recipes (Sympathy and Efficacy)," in «*Docente natura*». *Mélanges de médecine ancienne et médiévale offerts à Guy Sabbah*, ed. Armelle Debru and Nicoletta Palmieri (St Etienne: Université de St Etienne, 2001), 175–98. For an example of Galen conceding that an amulet could work, despite his scepticism, see *De simplicium medicamentorum* 6.3.10. For the opinion of other medical writers about amulets, see the useful collection of sources in Eugene Tavenner, *Studies in Magic from Latin Literature* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1916), 76–123.
185. As Graf has noted, a magical "explanation of an untimely death is relatively rare and late". Graf, "Untimely Death, Witchcraft, and Divine Vengeance," 139.
186. Indeed, Parsons has even suggested, in his study of the documentary data from Oxyrhynchus, that what limited evidence we have of the use of magic appears to come from a small, privileged section of society and reflect their preoccupations; "the diversion of well-heeled, sex-crazed urbanites". Peter John Parsons, *City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish: Greek Lives in Roman Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), 192.
187. The study of popular culture in modern and early modern societies is long established. See, for example, Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in*

Early Modern Europe (London: Temple Smith, 1978); Morag Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture: Class, Gender and History in Cultural Analysis, 1730 to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989). However, interest in the popular culture of the Roman empire is less so. For recent contributions, see John R. Clarke, *Art in the Lives of Ordinary Romans: Visual Representation and Non-Elite Viewers in Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 315*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Nicholas Horsfall, *The Culture of the Roman Plebs* (London: Duckworth, 2003); Robert C. Knapp, *Invisible Romans: Prostitutes, Outlaws, Slaves, Gladiators, Ordinary Men and Women the Romans That History Forgot* (London: Profile Books, 2011); Teresa Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jeremy Peter Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009). See also Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); Meggitt, "Sources: Use, Abuse and Neglect: The Importance of Ancient Popular Culture," in *Christianity at Corinth: The Scholarly Quest for the Corinthian Church*, ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 241–53.

188. Such as Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*; Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Collection of Ancient Texts*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
189. See the analysis of such literature found in Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire*. Of course, in an empire with limited literacy, in which no more than about 20% of males could read, this is not the same as saying that the texts themselves were necessarily widely read, but their contents were widely known and can be judged to be indicative of wider culture. For the figure of around 20%, see Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire*, 3.
190. See Teresa Morgan, "Divine-Human Relations in the Aesopic Corpus," *Journal of Ancient History* 1.1 (2013): 3–4. See also Christos A. Zafiropoulos, *Ethics in Aesop's Fables: The Augustana Collection* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 36–41. For the cultural significance of Aesop, see especially Leslie Kurke, *Aesopic Conversations Popular Tradition, Cultural Dialogue, and the Invention of Greek Prose* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). Aesop's *Fabulae* were popular in the first-century CE, as we can see in the Latin edition by Phaedrus and the Greek editions by Babrius and the anonymous compiler of the *Collectio Augustana*. See Zafiropoulos, *Ethics in Aesop's Fables*, 23. See also *Papyri Graecae Haunienses* 3.46. Although the fables ascribed to Aesop originated in the fourth century BCE, the versions popular

in the early Roman empire reflected and contributed to cultural assumptions of this later period. For fabular literature in the early Roman empire, see Francisco Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable: The Fable during the Roman Empire and in the Middle Ages*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2000). Such material has been widely neglected as a source for cultural, social and religious history. See, for example, H. S. Versnel, *Coping with the Gods* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 327.

191. Aesop, *Fab.* 56. For this fable, see Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, 151–52; Ben E. Perry, ed., *Babrius and Phaedrus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 430–31.
192. See William F. Hansen, ed., *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 106–62; Niklas Holzberg, *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 72–84. For an exception, cf. *Vit. Aesop.* 16.
193. See Tavenner, *Studies in Magic from Latin Literature*, 54. This is perhaps all the more surprising as Valerius Maximus' work reveals an intense religiosity. He was not averse to detailing prodigies and wonders (for example, Valerius Maximus 1.6) and he evidently wrote for the "religiously credulous". Hans Friedrich Mueller, *Roman Religion in Valerius Maximus* (London: Routledge, 2002), 53.
194. For Phlegon of Tralles, see William F. Hansen, ed., *Phlegon of Tralles' Book of Marvels*, trans. William F. Hansen (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1996). For paradoxography, see Guido Schepens, "Ancient Paradoxography: Origin, Evolution, Production and Reception. Part I. The Hellenistic Period," in *La letteratura di consumo nel mondo greco-latino. Atti del convegno internazionale, Cassino, 14–17 settembre 1994*, ed. Oronzo Pecere and Antonio Stramaglia (Cassino: Università degli Studi di Cassino, 1996), 375–409; Kris Delcroix, "Ancient Paradoxography: Origin, Evolution, Production and Reception. Part II. The Roman Period," in *La letteratura di consumo nel mondo greco-latino. Atti del convegno internazionale, Cassino, 14–17 settembre 1994*, ed. Oronzo Pecere and Antonio Stramaglia (Cassino: Università degli studi di Cassino, 1996), 410–60.
195. For Artemidorus' method, which involved both the critical use of pre-existing texts and interviews, see *Oneirocritica* 1.1. For a positive assessment of Artemidorus as an ethnographer of antiquity, see John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1990), 26. However, cf. William V. Harris, *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity*

- (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 113–15. See also Daniel E. Harris-McCoy, ed., *Artemidorus' Oneirocritica: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Robert J. White, ed., *The Interpretation of Dreams. Oneirocritica by Artemidorus* (Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes, 1975).
196. For example, Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 1.5; 3.22, 3.47, 3.51, 4.2, 45.
 197. For example, Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 4.18, 5.88.
 198. Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 1.79.
 199. Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 2.53, 4.33, 4.49.
 200. Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 3.24.
 201. Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 2.69 does include a single mention of necromancers.
 202. For the Philogelos and its cultural significance, see Barry Baldwin, ed., *The Philogelos, or, Laughter-Lover*, London Studies in Classical Philology 10 (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1983); Baldwin, *Roman and Byzantine Papers* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1989), 624–37; Roger D. Dawe, ed., “Philogelos” (Leipzig: Teubner, 2000); Hansen, *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature*, 272–82. For references to the use of joke books, see Athenaeus, 614d–e; Plautus, *Persa* 392–94; *Stichus* 454–55.
 203. Gerald M. Browne, ed., *Sortes Astrampsychi. Volumen I. Ecdosis Prior*. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983); Hansen, *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature*, 285–324; F. A. J. Hoogendijk and W. Clarysse, “De Sortes van Astrampsychus,” *Kleio* 11 (1981): 53–99; Randy Stewart, ed., *Sortes Astrampsychi. Volume II, Ecdosis Altera* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001). See also P. W. van der Horst, “Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity,” in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard Victor Rutgers (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 143–74.
 204. Diogenes Laertius 1.2.
 205. The closest we find to a concern about magic is one question about poisoning (*Sortes Astrampsychi* Q. 91, cf. R. 9.8). See *P.Oxy.* 12.1477; Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, 220. For the use of such do-it-yourself oracles, see Pausanias 7.25.10.
 206. The answer was obtained by throwing dice to determine which verse was applicable. For the *Homeromanteion*, see Derek Collins, “The Magic of Homeric Verses,” *Classical Philology* 103.3 (2008): 211–36, <https://doi.org/10.1086/596515>; Franco Maltomimi, “P. Lond. 121 (=PGM VII) 1–221: Homeromanteion,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 106 (1995): 107–22; Parsons, *City of the*

Sharp-Nosed Fish: Greek Lives in Roman Egypt, 189–90; Gregg Schwendner, “Under Homer’s Spell,” in *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World*, ed. Leda Jean Ciraolo and Jonathan Lee Seidel (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 107–18. Versions of this oracle can be found in *P.Oxy.* 56.3831; *PGM* VII.1–148; *P.Bon.* 1.3.

207. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, xli.
208. Although the analysis of secularism and atheism are long established in the study of religion, “non-religion” has only recently become a focus of considerable attention. See, especially, the work of the *Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network*, which, though influenced by the seminal text of Colin Campbell, first published in 1971, has just been initiated. See Colin Campbell, *Toward a Sociology of Irreligion: New Perspectives in Sociology* (London: Macmillan, 1971). Religious indifference and “non-religion” are not identical, the latter is usually taken to imply “a relationship of difference to religion”. Lois Lee, “Research Note: Talking about a Revolution: Terminology for the New Field of Non-Religion Studies,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 27.1 (2012): 131. So far “non-religion” has only been scrutinised in relation to modernity, but there are significant commonalities with the ancient world. It is possible that the reluctance to examine religious indifference in antiquity owes itself, in part, to an understandable reaction to earlier, prejudicial and pejorative constructions of Roman religion as something that had “failed”, an interpretative trope common in, for example, in past histories of the origins of Christianity that tried to explain its “success”. See, for example, W. H. C Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 904.
209. Downing does not draw such a distinction which makes his resulting analysis problematic. See Downing, “Magic and Scepticism.”
210. See R. J Hankinson, *The Sceptics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1998). A school that would see a revival in the late second century CE with Sextus Empiricus. See Alan Bailey, *Sextus Empiricus and Pyrrhonian Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); Richard Bett, *Pyrrho, His Antecedents, and His Legacy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
211. Although it was a common trope in anti-magical writing to complain that its practitioners functionally denied the existence of the gods because of the power they claimed over them (Hippocrates, *Morb. Sacr.* 3.20; Lucan, *Phars.* 6.523; Plato, *Leg.* 909a), gods, albeit primarily chthonic ones, were central to magical rites.

212. See, for example, the complaint of Jason P. Davies, *Rome's Religious History: Livy, Tacitus and Ammianus on Their Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17.
213. See Denis C. Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts, and Beliefs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 12. See also Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39.
214. Ken Dowden, *Religion and the Romans* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), 8.
215. Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome*, 14.
216. Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?: An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 41–57. For all the analytical value of this phrase, it is an uncomfortable one in its essentialist assumptions about the cultures and nations that constitute the Balkans.
217. See Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome*, 12–46; Carin M. C. Green, “Varro’s Three Theologies and Their Influence on the *Fasti*,” in *Ovid’s Fasti*, ed. Geraldine Herbert-Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 71–100.
218. Though cf. *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* 1168.29–33 and the case of “Apistos” at the Asclepeion at Epidauros. Healing cults, such as that of Asclepius, may have been the exception to this rule.
219. Even if in magic, this power was often conceptualised as something at the beck and call of the magician. See Apuleius, *Metam.* 3.15; Lucan, *Phars.* 6.434–506; Pliny, *Nat.* 28.27.104; Libanius, *Decl.* 41; Pseudo-Quintilian, *Decl. mai.* 10. Some perceived that such power did not originate with the gods but demonic or ghostly forces (for example, Apuleius, *Apol.* 43). The control of demons and ghosts was a recurring theme in magical and anti-magical literature. See, for example, *PGM* XIa.1–40; Apuleius, *Metam.* 1.10, 9.29–31; Eusebius, *C. Hier.* 27; Ps-Quintilian, *Decl. mai.* 19. It should be noted that demons and ghosts were generally closely related in the early imperial period, though not in Judaism and Christianity; see Apuleius, *De deo Socr.* 15; Pausanias 1.32.4–5; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 3.38; Tertullian, *An.* 57.
220. For a helpful discussion of the different conceptions of belief in the critical study of religion, see Martin D. Stringer, *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008), 39–46.

221. There have been some innovative studies of the social world of philosophers in the early Roman empire, such as Kendra Eshleman, *The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). However, there has been little analysis of their relative significance within society as whole, and which of their ideas, if any, might have been "popular", with the occasional, notable, exception, such as Abraham Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989). For philosophical commitments in the Graeco-Roman world, see David Sedley, "Philosophical Allegiance in the Greco-Roman World," in *Philosophia Togata: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, ed. Miriam T. Griffin and Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 97–119.
222. Martin Ferguson Smith, *The Philosophical Inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda*, *Ergänzungsbände zu den Tituli Asiae Minoris* 20 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996); Smith, *Supplement to Diogenes of Oinoanda: The Epicurean Inscription*, *Scuola di Epicuro. Supplemento* 3 (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2003).
223. For Cynics see Luis E. Navia, *Classical Cynicism: A Critical Study* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1996); Navia, *Diogenes the Cynic: The War against the World* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2005). Despite the plethora of scholarly literature on Cynicism, Aune is right to note that they are often overlooked in surveys of Hellenistic philosophy. See David E. Aune, "The Problem of the Passions in Cynicism," in *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman Thought*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 48–49; Navia, ed., *The Philosophy of Cynicism: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995).
224. Though see Horsfall, *The Culture of the Roman Plebs*, 54–55. The popularity of the Epicurean epitaph "Non fui, fui, non sum, non curo" ("I was not; I was; I am not; I do not care") may be indicative of the wider impact of that school.
225. See Polybius 16.12; cf. also 3.48. See, for an example from the early Roman empire, Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.86, although Tacitus too could on occasion demonstrate this failing. See Ronald Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 521–26. See also Lucian, *Quomodo historia conscribenda sit; Vera historia* and J. R. Morgan, "Lucian's True Histories and the Wonders beyond Thule of Antonius Diogenes," *Classical Quarterly* 35.2 (1985): 475–90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/639077>. For the irrelevance of the supernatural (though not necessarily the divine) in theories of historical causation following

- Thucydides, see Charles W. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 81. For a low estimation of the credulity of many historians from the early Roman empire, see Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 7.16.
226. Jason Davies, "Religion in Historiography," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians*, ed. Andrew Feldherr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 168. Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Antiquitates Romanae* provides an excellent example of this. Dionysus' rational approach to myth is so thoroughgoing that it has been called "euhemeristic". Matthew Fox, "History and Rhetoric in Dionysius of Halicarnassus," *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/300977>. However, this may well be a rhetorical move common to many authors, and an aspect of authorial persona. Jörg Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans*, trans. Richard Gordon (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 139.
227. See, for example, Diodorus Siculus 4.47.3–4. Even a writer such as Livy, who provides a list of prodigies for each year of Roman history, is undecided about both the origins and meanings of many of these, and critical of the credulity of those who generated such stories (for example, Livy 24.10.6). For an example of such ambivalence, see Josephus, *A.J.* 1.108, 3.81, 3.322, 4.158, 10.281, 17.354.
228. Dio Cassius, for example, could recount dreams and signs that were taken by Septimius Severus as an indication that he would become emperor (73.23.1) whilst complaining that many stories about miraculous events are no more than the result of "idle talk and fear" (14.57.7). Robert M. Grant, *Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Thought* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1952), 171.
229. See, for example, Hippocrates, *Morb. Sacr.* 1. It is important to note that the disease was still considered "sacred" by the writer of this treatise. As Eijk has demonstrated, the author does not reject the divine character of the disease, but modifies the sense in which this disease (and, indeed, all diseases), may be regarded as divine: it was divine not because it had been sent by a god, but because it shares in the divine character of nature in showing a fixed pattern of cause and effect and in being subordinated to a natural "law" or regularity. Philip J. van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45. See also Owsei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology.*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns

- Hopkins University Press, 1971). For the rationalism of the Hippocratic corpus, see Jacques Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, trans. Malcolm B. DeBevoise (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 181–209. Interestingly the author of *De morbo sacro* saw the claims of magic as the denial and negation of the power of the gods. See Hippocrates, *Morb. Sacr.* 3.20. Cf. Lucan, *Phars.* 6.492–94.
230. Galen, *De libris propriis* 2.19.18, 4; *De Praegnotione ad Epigenem* 2.12; *De methodo medendi* 9.4. However, Harris maintains that Galen, like many in the empire, had become uncomfortable about such epiphanic dreams and they did “not suit the image of himself he was keen on maintaining”. Harris, *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity*, 64. For Galen's religious beliefs, see Fridolf Kudlien, “Galen's Religious Beliefs,” in *Galen: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Vivian Nutton (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1981), 117–30. See also Mark Holowchak, “Interpreting Dreams for Corrective Regimen: Diagnostic Dreams in Greco-Roman Medicine,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 56.4 (2001): 169–79; Steven M. Oberhelman, “Dreams in Graeco-Roman Medicine,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. II. 37.1*, ed. W. Haase (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993), 127–36. For the relationship between secular and sacred in Greek medicine, see Herman F. J. Horstmanshoff, “‘Did the God Learn Medicine?’ Asclepius and Temple Medicine in Aelius Aristides' Sacred Tales,” in *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*, ed. Herman F. J. Horstmanshoff and Marten Stol (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 325–42; Ido Israelowich, *Society, Medicine, and Religion in the Sacred Tales of Aelius Aristides* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); G. E. R. Lloyd, *In the Grip of Disease: Studies in the Greek Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 40–83.
 231. For the different therapeutic approaches used in the Roman empire see, for example, Audrey Cruse, *Roman Medicine* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004); Ralph Jackson, *Doctors and Diseases in the Roman Empire* (London: British Museum Press, 1993); Vivian Nutton, “Healers in the Medical Marketplace: Towards a Social History of Graeco-Roman Medicine,” in *Medicine in Society: Historical Essays*, ed. Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 15–58.
 232. The famous incident in which Asclepiades of Bithynia, the physician credited with bringing Greek medicine to Rome, restored a man already on his funeral bier — by observing the presence of his vital signs and administering drugs — is emblematic of such a naturalistic approach to medicine. See Apuleius, *Florida* 19; Pliny, *Nat.* 7.37.124;

Celsus, *De medicina* 2.6.15;. Cf. Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4.45; Luke 7.11-17.

233. The continuing significance of writings by the likes of Euhemerus, Palaephatus, Xenophanes, and Zoilus, which encouraged the rational explanation of myth, no doubt contributed to such a culture. For Euhemerus, see Marek Winiarczyk, *Euhemerus von Messene: Leben, Werk und Nachwirkung* (München: Saur, 2002); Marek Winiarczyk, *The "Sacred History" of Euhemerus of Messene* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013). For Palaephatus, see Jacob Stern, ed., *Palaephatus: Peri Apiston (on Unbelievable Tales)* (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1996). For Xenophanes, see James Lesher, ed., *Xenophanes of Colophon: Fragments. A Text and Translation with a Commentary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). For Zoilus, see Henrietta V. Apfel, "Homeric Criticism in the Fourth Century B.C.," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 69 (1938): 245–58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/283178>. For the Homeromastix tradition more generally, of which Zoilus is the most famous figure, see J. T. Katridis, "A Cynic Homeromastix," in *Serta Turyniana: Studies in Greek Literature and Palaeography in Honor of Alexander Turyn*, ed. John L. Heller and J. K. Newman (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 361–73. The persistence of knowledge of such writers is evident from Christian apologetic literature, which often made use of their criticisms. See, for example, Darryl W. Palmer, "Atheism, Apologetic, and Negative Theology in the Greek Apologists of the Second Century," *Vigiliae Christianae* 37.3 (1983): 234–59.
234. See Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 4 (I would like to thank Richard Carrier for this reference). See also Cicero, *Nat. d.* 3. 37, 89 for similar traditions. For Diagoras, see Leonard Woodbury, "The Date and Atheism of Diagoras of Melos," *Phoenix* 19.3 (1965): 178–211, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1086282>. For atheism in antiquity, see Jan N. Bremmer, "Atheism in Antiquity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11–26. However, it is probably more appropriate to call such figures *adevists* rather than atheists, to use the term initially employed by Max Müller to refer to those who denied the gods rather than the divine *per se*. See James Thrower, *Western Atheism: A Short History* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1971), 17. See also Thrower, *The Alternative Tradition: Religion and the Rejection of Religion in the Ancient World*, Religion and Society (Hague, Netherlands) 18 (The Hague: Mouton, 1980).
235. See Suetonius, *Tib.* 2.6.

236. For example, Julius Caesar, and indeed the whole Senate ignored adverse omens when he sought approval for a new agrarian law. See Suetonius, *Divus Julius* 20.1.
237. Suetonius, *Cal.* 5.1.
238. Some even excised them entirely from Homer. See James J. O'Hara, "Fragment of a Homer-Hypothesis with No Gods," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 56 (1984): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20184046>.
239. The kind of reaction found in Thucydides' account of the plague in Athens (2.53). See also Lucretius 6.1272–1286.
240. *P.Ryl.* 3.493. See also Aesop, *Fab.* 119; Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 155.
241. Arrian, *Epictetus Enchiridion* 31.
242. See, for example, Lucian, *Juppiter confutatus*, *Juppiter tragoedus*, *Deorum concilium* and *Alexander (Pseudomantis)*, or Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis*.
243. See, for example, the libidinous and sacrilegious graffito from Catania in Sicily discussed in G. Manganaro, "Graffiti e iscrizioni funerarie della Sicilia orientale," *Helikon* 2 (1962): 490–93. See also Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 216–17.
244. The most famous attack on the oracles in antiquity was *The Detection of Impostors* of Oenomaus of Gadara, a Cynic who lived during the reign of Hadrian. Significant extracts from his work appear in Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 5.18–36 (cf. his remarks on fate in 6.7). Oenomaus was criticised by Julian for his damaging effect on belief in the gods. See Julian, *Orationes* 7.209 (cf. 6.199). See also Jürgen Hammerstaedt, *Die Orakelkritik des Kynikers Oenomaus* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1988). Oenomaus gained a reputation for being the most learned pagan philosopher amongst Jews. See *Genesis Rabbah* 65.20; Louis H. Feldman, *Jewish Life and Thought among Greeks and Romans: Primary Readings* (London: Continuum, 1996), 130.
245. For example, Valerius Maximus 1.1.19.
246. For example, Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.69.
247. See, for example, the actions under Tiberius (Josephus, *A.J.* 18.4; Suetonius, *Tib.* 36.1). See also Dio Cassius 59.28; Suetonius, *Cal.* 22. Cf. also Josephus, *A.J.* 18.257–305; Philo, *Legat.* 134. Of course, the introduction of Isis worship into Rome was not straightforward, and such actions might be viewed as a response to a foreign cult that

had not, unlike, for example, the cult of Cybele, been formally established in the city (Cybele arrived in Rome in 204 BCE on the orders of the Senate, in response to a Sibylline oracle [Livy 29.10–14]; see Mary Beard, “The Roman and the Foreign: The Cult of the ‘Great Mother’ in Imperial Rome,” in *Shamanism, History, and the State*, ed. Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 164–90. However, such behaviour does show a disregard for the power of a god, one that was venerated throughout the empire, and reveals implicit assumptions about human primacy. Despite a cultural concern with antiquity and continuity, cults were regularly superseded, dissolved, abandoned, and sometimes abolished in a process of the focalisation and defocalisation of specific deities in Roman life. See Michael Lipka, *Roman Gods: A Conceptual Approach* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

248. Most famously Augustus, who, dressed as Apollo, oversaw a scandalous dinner party of twelve other “gods”. See, Suetonius, *Aug.* 70.
249. Kathleen M. Coleman, “Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 80 (1990): 44–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/300280>.
250. Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, 26–27. In particular by theft or neglect of their property.
251. Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, 28.
252. On impiety, see Mario Torelli, ed., *Le Délit religieux dans la cité antique: table ronde: Rome, 6-7 avril 1978*, Collection de l’école Française de Rome 48 (Roma: Ecole française de Rome, 1981).
253. *CIL* VI.27365. The epitaph asked those reading it, if they had any doubts about the existence of ghosts, to call out to the dead person. The joke relied on a local echo. See Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, 6.
254. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditationes* 1.6.
255. Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.5.
256. Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 210. It should be noted that this section is indebted to Gordon’s ground-breaking treatment of the subject. See Gordon Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 210–43.
257. Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 210.
258. Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts*, 177.
259. Aesop, *Fab.* 56. For this fable, see Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the*

- Greco-Roman World*, 150–52; Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 430–31.
260. See, for example, Ennius, *Telamo* frg. 134b. This is quoted in Cicero, *Div.* 1.132. However, see Alex Nice, “‘Ennius or Cicero?’ The Disreputable Diviners at Cicero, de Divinatione 1.132,” *Acta Classica* 44 (2001): 153–66. For Ennius, see Henry D. Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).
 261. Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 213. See, for example, Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.8.24f; Propertius 2.4; Ovid, *Amores* 2.99–106, *Remedia amoris* 261–290; Nemesianus, *Eclogae* 2.62–73.
 262. Ovid, *Her.* 12.163–167. See also Deianeira in Pseudo-Seneca, *Hercules Oetaeus* 465–72. See also Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.39.
 263. See Cicero, *Nat. d.* 3.12; cf. Horace, *Sat.* 2.6.77f. Such a topos was an old one and can be found in the fourth-century BCE comedy of Anaxilas, *Lyre-Maker* fr. 18. See John M. Edmonds, ed., *The Fragments of Attic Comedy*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1957), 336–39. Cf. Origen, *Cels.* 3.59 for similar remarks by Celsus about the categories of people drawn to Christianity.
 264. Tacitus, *Ann.* 16.30–33.
 265. Galen, *De simplicium medicamentorum* 6. See Véronique Boudon, “Aux marges de la médecine rationnelle: médecins et charlatans à Rome au temps de Galien,” *Revue des études grecques* 116 (2003): 109–31.
 266. Pliny, *Nat.* 30.5.14–15. See also Suetonius, *Nero* 34.4. Pliny did, however, note that “if there is a shimmer of truth in it, that shimmer owes more to chemistry than magic.” (*Nat.* 30.6.17).
 267. Lucian, *Demonax* 23. See also the joke in Apuleius, *Metam.* 3.23.
 268. See, for example, Pliny, *Nat.* 25.5.10. For the “Thessalian trick” see Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.60. See also Livy 44.37 for a different use of knowledge of an eclipse.
 269. Plutarch, *Mor.* 145d. Cf. 416f–147a.
 270. Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.39. See, for example, Lucian, *Alex.* 21 for a reference to such a work.
 271. For example, the theory of effluences proposed by Empedocles and Democritus allowed them to explain magical phenomena as in accord with natural laws. See Gordon, “Imagining Greek and Roman Magic,” 221–22.
 272. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 4.28–42. As Gordon has noted, Hippolytus’ remarks appear to be dependent upon a Cynic source as they are “founded on the Cynic contrast between reason

- and folly". Gordon, "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic," 218. Dickie claims that Hippolytus' source is a lost text called *The Art of Thrasymedes*. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, 219. Early Christian attacks on magic more often presuppose that it made use of supernatural but malign power, as we can see, for example, in Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 1.23.
273. See Peter Lamont, *Extraordinary Beliefs: A Historical Approach to a Psychological Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34–43.
 274. Hippolytus, *Haer.* 4.41. See Lucian, *Alex.* 26.
 275. Hippolytus, *Haer.* 4.32. For accounts of mechanical devices intended to create such special effects, see Steven J. Scherrer, "Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13–15," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103.4 (1984): 599–610, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3260470>.
 276. See PGM VII.167–86. See also PGM XIb, VII.149–54. See David Bain, "Salpe's ΠΑΙΓΝΙΑ: Athenaeus 322A and Plin. H. N. 28.38," *Classical Quarterly* 48.1 (1998): 262–68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/639768>; Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 119–20; James N. Davidson, "Don't Try This at Home: Pliny's Salpe, Salpe's Paignia and Magic," *Classical Quarterly* 45.2 (1995): 590–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/639553>.
 277. The setting of the *Paignia* of Democritus. For similar dinner party tricks see Athenaeus, 2.52d, 2.57b–d, 2.58f, 2.69f, 3.84c; Pliny, *Nat.* 35.50.175; Aulus Gellius, *NA* 1.38.
 278. For Salpe, see Pliny, *Nat.* 28.7.38, 28.18.66, 28.23.82, 28.80.262, 32.47.135, 32.51.140. See also Athenaeus, 322a. For Anaxilaus see, for example, Epiphanius, *Panarion* 34.1; Pliny, *Nat.* 35.50.175. For similar tricks, see Lucian, *Alex.* 12, 14, 19–21; Achilles Tatius, 3.15–20.
 279. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*, 218.
 280. Hippocrates, *Morb. Sacr.* 2.30
 281. Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.39. See Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, 66. It is also similar to the "secondary rationalisations" suggested by Evans-Pritchard to explain why, regardless of experience, magic was not thought to fail. See Glucklich, *The End of Magic*, 210. The idea that the validation of magic is fundamentally social — that is, it requires the validation of clients, an element of Philostratus' critique — also has analogies with the insights of Mauss. See Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 150.

282. Pliny, *Nat.* 18.8.41–43.
283. Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope*.
284. For a study of how magic in antiquity was indeed deployed in response to such experiences, see Fritz Graf, "How to Cope with a Difficult Life: A View of Ancient Magic," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans Kippenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 93–114.
285. Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope*, 2.
286. Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope*, 234. In making this distinction she is using Niklas Luhmann, *Risk* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993), 30.
287. Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope*, 234.
288. Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 7.
289. Exemplified by the failure of one of Lindquist's informants, a formerly impoverished businessman, to mention that he had consulted a magical practitioner when providing an account of the past; he now speaks in "didactic monologues on the worth of having done it all by himself". Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope*, 226.
290. For Kleinman's "explanatory model", see Arthur Kleinman, Leon Eisenberg, and Byron Good, "Culture, Illness, and Care," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 88.2 (1978): 251–88.
291. See Tertullian, *An.* 57. Studies of formative Christianity and magic are numerous. See, for example, Arnold, *Ephesians*; Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity"; Garrett, "Light on a Dark Subject"; Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*; John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, SBT 2.28 (London: SCM Press, 1974); Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times*, SNTSMS 55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Klauck, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity*; Todd Klutz, *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, JSNTSup 245 (London: T&T Clark, 2003); Michael Labahn and Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, eds., *A Kind of Magic: Understanding Magic in the New Testament and Its Religious Environment*, LNTS 306 (London: T&T Clark, 2007); Justin J. Meggitt, "Magic, Healing and Early Christianity: Consumption and Competition," in *Meanings of Magic: From the Bible to Buffalo Bill*, ed. Amy Wygant (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2006), 89–114; Reimer, *Miracle and Magic: A Study in the Acts of the Apostles and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana*; Smith, *Jesus the Magician*; Smith, "How Magic Was Changed by the Triumph of Christianity," in *Studies in the*

Cult of Yahweh. Volume Two: New Testament, Early Christianity, Magic, ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* 130 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 208–16; Francis C. R. Thee, *Julius Africanus and the Early Christian View of Magic*, HUT 19 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984); Rodney L. Thomas, *Magical Motifs in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 416 (London: T&T Clark, 2010). The possibility that the nature and intensity of belief in magic can fluctuate as a result of ideological changes can be seen by the examination of comparative data. See, for example, Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*, 2nd ed. (London: Pimlico, 1993); Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Gerrie ter Haar, ed., *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006); Jean S. La Fontaine, *Speak of the Devil: Tales of Satanic Abuse in Contemporary England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 190–92; Lindquist, *Conjuring Hope*; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 755–800. However, it is important to attend to the definitional assumptions about what constitutes "magic" in these works, which are varied and can be problematic. See, for example, Geertz's criticism of Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, and Kieckhefer's criticism of Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, found in Geertz, "An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, I" and Richard Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic," *The American Historical Review* 99.3 (1994): 813–36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2167771>.

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